

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 7, inclusive, answered orally.

School Accommodation Provision

8. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department has assessed the need for a second level school for the City West and Saggart area in Dublin which takes into account the existing and future needs of the local community; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14375/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy may be aware, in order to plan for school provision and analyse the relevant demographic data, my Department divides the country into 314 school planning areas. My Department uses a Geographical Information System to identify where the pressure for school places across the country will arise. This system uses data from a range of sources. Where demographic data indicates that additional provision is required, the delivery of such additional provision is dependent on the particular circumstances of each case and may, depending on the circumstances, be provided through either one, or a combination of, the following:

- Utilising existing unused capacity within a school or schools
- Extending the capacity of a school or schools
- Provision of a new school or schools.
- For school planning purposes, the Saggart and Citywest areas are located within the Tallaght and Newcastle/Rathcoole school planning areas.
- A new 1,000 pupil post-primary in the Kingswood area of Tallaght was established in September 2016 to serve the needs of students in the Tallaght school planning area, which includes Citywest. A building project for this school commenced construction in August 2017.
- In addition, a new 1,000 pupil post-primary school is due to be established in September 2018 in Firhouse/Oldbawn, which is adjacent to the Tallaght area.
- Nationwide demographic exercises involving all school planning areas, which will determine where additional school accommodation will be needed in the future, are currently ongoing and it is anticipated that decisions based on these exercises will be announced in the coming weeks.

Physical Education

9. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way in which he will promote the importance of physical education in schools as part of a healthy living agenda; the steps he will take to support the construction of physical education facilities in schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14278/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department fully supports the promotion of healthy lifestyles in schools and has issued circulars to support and strengthen schools' efforts in developing in young people the skills and attitudes needed to make informed decisions about their health. Through the curriculum students are taught the key skills and knowledge to enable them to make healthier life choices and to develop the resilience to reject negative options. This can be seen through subjects such as Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), Home Economics, as well as in Physical Education and as part of the new Junior Cycle Wellbeing Programme that was introduced to all first year students from September 2017.

My Department works very closely with the Department of Health in promoting the 'Healthy Ireland' agenda in schools.

Another significant development in this area is the introduction on a phased basis from September 2018 of a new examinable Leaving Certificate Physical Education subject and a new non-examinable Framework for Senior Cycle Physical Education.

As part of the National Development Plan 2018-2027, increased funding has been provided for the school sector capital investment programme. This funding will allow a continued focus on the generation of new permanent school places to keep pace with demographic demand. The new funding will also provide for an additional focus on refurbishment of the existing school stock. As part of the National Development Plan, I announced a PE build and modernisation programme. This will ensure that students in all Post Primary schools have access to appropriate facilities to support PE provision.

This ramp up in funding will take place progressively over the period of the Plan.

Question No. 10 answered orally.

Special Educational Needs Staff

11. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the immense work carried out by resource teachers with special needs children at a school (details supplied) under very difficult conditions; if following his sanctioning of a grant to build two new resource rooms, consideration will be given to covering the shortfall in actual costs in order that the staff and students can secure the learning environment that they need and deserve; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14260/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school to which the Deputy refers was approved a devolved grant under my Department's Additional Accommodation Scheme 2016 to provide 2 Resource Rooms. This project was devolved to the School Authority for delivery.

The School Authority recently submitted a request for additional funding based on the tender report and supporting documentation which was assessed by my Department.

I am pleased to inform the Deputy that a decision to approve the additional funding has been communicated to the school authority who may now proceed to construction.

Questions Nos. 12 and 13 answered orally.

School Accommodation Provision

14. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the demographic review taking place on the need for additional secondary school places in south County Kildare; the progress being made on planned secondary school extensions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14423/18]

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

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

- Utilising existing unused capacity within a school or schools,
- Extending the capacity of a school or schools,
- Provision of a new school or schools.

It is anticipated that decisions based on the nationwide demographic exercises will be announced in the coming weeks.

Projects are currently being progressed in respect of four schools in the South Kildare area. A building project for St. Conleth's Community College is currently on site and the project is expected to be completed in time for the commencement of the academic year in September, 2018. Also, a building project for St Paul's Secondary School, Monasterevin is currently at Stage 2(b) of the architectural planning process.

In addition, building projects for Athy Community College and Cross & Passion Secondary School, Kilcullen are included in my Department's Capital Programme. In the context of progressing the building projects, my Department has undertaken site visits to the schools.

The building project for Athy Community College 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.

Additional capacity in the region of 1,700 school places will be provided when projects at these four schools are completed. The provision of these additional places through planned post-primary school extensions is taken into account in the Department's demographic exercises at post-primary level to determine where additional school accommodation is needed.

Oideachas Gaeilge

15. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** den an Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna an bhfuil sé buartha faoin gcéim siar atá tugtha don Ghaeilge labhartha ar shiollabas na Gaeilge don Teastas Sóisearach; cén tionchar a bheidh aige seo ar chuspóirí na Straitéise 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge a bhaint amach; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [10094/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Tá an Roinn fós tiomanta chun úsáid na Gaeilge labhartha a spreagadh. Bainfidh na daltaí an-leas as an taithí foghlama a dtacaítear leis sna sonraíochtaí don tSraith Shóisearach nua don Ghaeilge a ndearna taighde forleathan lena haghaidh. Ina theannta sin, rinne an Comhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnachta comhordú ar phróiseas leathan comhairliúcháin a chuir an-chuid eolais ar fáil don fhorbairt, lena n-áirítear tuairimí na múinteoirí agus na ndaltaí.

Den chéad uair, tá dhá shonraíocht ann don ábhar - T1 agus T2 (Teanga 1 agus Teanga 2). Tá sonraíocht T1 ann do na daltaí sin a dhéanann staidéar ar a gcuid ábhar uile trí mheán na Gaeilge agus tá sé beartaithe go gcuirfear ar fáil iad i nGaelcholáistí, i scoileanna i gceantair phleanála Gaeltachta agus in Aonaid Lán-Ghaeilge. Tá an tsonraíocht T2 beartaithe le húsáid i scoileanna a oibríonn trí mheán an Bhéarla.

Cuireann an dá shonraíocht béim shuntasach ar an nGaeilge mar theanga labhartha. Léirítear é seo sna sraitheanna comhtháite, a chuireann struchtúr ar eispéiris foghlama na ndaltaí le linn na dt trí bliana den tsraith shóisearach - Cumas Cumarsáide, Teanga agus Feasacht Chultúrtha agus Féinfheasacht an Fhoghlaiméora. Roimhe seo bhí an scrúdú cainte roghnach agus rinne níos lú ná aon trian de na daltaí é. Ar an láimh eile, éilíonn na socrúithe measúnaithe nua ar gach dalta dul i mbun measúnaithe maidir lena gcuid scileanna cainte féin trí mheasúnú sa seomra ranga. Tugann sé seo deis níos fearr do gach dalta scileanna inniúlachta i labhairt na teanga a fhorbairt agus a fheabhsú agus a gcumas a chothú chun an Ghaeilge a úsáid.

Féachann na sonraíochtaí seo le soláthar oideachais ar ardchaighdeán trí mheán na Gaeilge a chur chun cinn agus úsáid na Gaeilge i measc daoine óga agus i bpobail scoile Gaeltachta a spreagadh, agus cabhróidh sé le go leor cuspóirí a bhaineann le Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge 2010-2030.

Gaelscoil Issues

16. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason no new Gaelscoileanna are due to be opened in September 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14271/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In November 2015, 13 new schools were announced to be established in 2017 and 2018; four of these were primary schools. Following completion of patronage processes for all four schools in May 2017, three of the four were established in September 2017, one as a Gaelscoil in Ballincollig under the patronage of An Foras Pátrúnachta. The remaining primary school will be established in 2018.

From 2011 to 2017, 30 new primary schools have been established, 7 of which have been Gaelscoileanna, under the patronage of An Foras Pátrúnachta.

- 2017 Gaelscoil an Chaisleáin, Ballincollig, Co. Cork
- 2016 Gaelscoil na Fuinseoige, Goatstown/Stillorgan, Dublin

- 2013 Gaelscoil Mhic Aodha, Kildare Town
- 2013 Gaelscoil Shliabh Rua, Ballinteer/Stepaside, Dublin
- 2013 Gaelscoil Teach Giúise, Firhouse/Oldbawn, Dublin
- 2012 Gaelscoil an Chuillin, Mulhuddart/Tyrrelstown, Dublin
- 2011 Gaelscoil na Mí, Ashbourne, Co. Meath

A patronage process is run after it has been decided, based on demographic analysis, that a new school is required. It is open to all prospective patron applicants to propose provision of Irish-medium education in their application. Parental preferences for each patron from parents of children who reside in the school planning area, together with the extent of diversity currently available in the area, are key to decisions in relation to the outcome of this process. Parental preference for the medium of instruction of the new school is a specific part of the assessment process and informs decisions concerning the school's medium of instruction. In this regard, prospective patrons were requested to submit completed parental preferences indicating the language through which parents would prefer their children to be educated.

In order to plan for school provision and analyse the relevant demographic data, my Department divides the country into 314 school planning areas and uses a Geographical Information System, incorporating data from a range of sources, to identify where the pressure for school places across the country will arise. With this information, my Department carries out nationwide demographic exercises at primary and post-primary level to determine where additional school accommodation is needed.

It is anticipated that decisions based on current nationwide demographic exercises will be announced in the coming weeks, after which patronage processes will be run to decide both who will operate each school and the medium of instruction of these schools.

School Placement

17. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of new and additional school places provided in County Offaly since 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14283/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): During the period 2010-2017, the number of additional permanent school places provided in Co Offaly was 1,765 and the number of replacement places provided was 2,149, giving a total of 3,914 permanent places provided in that county.

Questions Nos. 18 and 19 answered orally.

School Staff

20. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to difficulties caused by the five day rule; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14296/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): It is the policy of my Department that only qualified personnel should be employed by schools as teachers. Unquali-

fied personnel should not be appointed except in exceptional circumstances and only when all avenues for recruiting qualified personnel have been exhausted and only for quite limited time periods. Circular 0031/2011 issued by my Department details a cascade of measures for the recruitment of teachers by schools, prioritising registered teachers over retired registered teachers and unregistered people.

Other than the limited exceptions under Ministerial Regulations, Section 30 of the Teaching Council Act 2001, prohibits payment from Oireachtas funds to people employed as teachers in recognised schools unless they are registered with the teaching Council. The limited exceptions provided for in the regulations allow for an unregistered person to be appointed where an employer has made all reasonable efforts to appoint a registered teacher and no registered teacher is available to take up the position in question. An unregistered person, so appointed, may not be paid from public funds for a continuous period of more than 5 consecutive school days. The employer must be satisfied that any such person appointed is competent and capable of acting in the place of a registered teacher in the school. The employer must also continue to make all reasonable efforts to employ a registered teacher.

In relation to the supply of qualified registered teachers I have recently convened the first meeting of the Teacher Supply Steering Group, a specialist group of stakeholders, chaired by the Secretary General of my Department. This group has been established to ensure that there is an adequate supply of quality teachers to meet the needs of primary and post primary schools and to ensure we can deliver on the Government's ambition to make Ireland's Education and Training Service the best in Europe by 2026.

The terms of reference of the steering group include to evaluate policy initiatives both for short-term and longer term implementation to respond to constraints in the system which have been already identified, and others which it identifies in the course of its work on teacher supply and demand. Any extension to the 5 day rule should therefore be considered by the steering group in the first instance.

Question No. 21 answered orally.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

22. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps his Department is taking to provide sufficient ASD units and class places in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14263/18]

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

The National Council for Special Education is responsible, through its network of Special Needs Organisers, for the development and delivery and co-ordination of education services to children with Special Educational Needs, including the establishment of special classes.

The number of ASD special classes in Co. Wexford has more than doubled from 17 in 2011 to 41 in 2017/18 school year.

The NCSE, in planning for special classes, will consider present and future need for such classes, to support the educational needs of the children concerned.

The NCSE has informed my Department that, in general, they are satisfied that there will be sufficient ASD special class placements to meet identified need in the Wexford area for the forthcoming school year.

Parents/guardians of children with special needs who may need advice or are experiencing difficulties in locating a school placement should contact their local Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO).

Educational Disadvantage

23. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when additional schools will be approved for support under DEIS; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14417/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Tackling educational disadvantage and helping children to achieve their potential is a key priority of the Action Plan for Education. For the first time since 2009, my Department has brought 79 new schools into DEIS, and upgraded the level of support for another 30 schools.

As I have recently advised the Deputy, a further assessment of all schools is currently underway in the context of the DEIS Programme. This assessment takes account of school data for the current school year combined with the updated Pobal HP Index of Deprivation, which is based on Small Area Population statistics derived from the 2016 National Census.

It is anticipated that the assessment process will be completed shortly. This will be followed by the necessary quality assurance after which the data will be available to my Department to inform policy decisions in terms of future provision in the DEIS programme, including decisions with regard to additional schools identified as requiring supports.

We have, for the first time, introduced an objective, statistics based model for deciding which schools merit inclusion in the DEIS Programme and it is applied uniformly across all the schools in the country. As you are aware, the identification of levels of disadvantage in schools is based on the data provided by schools themselves, combines with publically available Small Area of Population Census data, as represented by the Pobal HP Index. This approach was informed by the Review of the DEIS Programme and a detailed account of the methodology adopted is available on my Department's website.

School Transport Applications

24. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the fact that 327 children who applied on time for his Department's school transport scheme were not allocated seats; if all 327 children were facilitated by private transport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14455/18]

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

Currently over 116,000 children, including almost 12,000 children with special educational needs, are being transported in over 4,500 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually at a total cost of almost €190 million in 2017.

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

In general, children are eligible for school transport if they meet the distance criteria and are attending their nearest school.

Under the terms of the scheme a minimum number of 10 eligible children residing in a distinct locality, as determined by Bus Éireann, are required before consideration may be given to the establishment or retention of school transport services, provided this can be done within reasonable cost limits having regard to the available resources for the overall scheme.

For school bus operating purposes a “distinct locality” is a cluster of eligible children who reside in the same general area, in the same general direction from the school attended, as determined by Bus Éireann taking cognisance of the local road network. A service to convey a group of children whose homes are at scattered points in a school district would not be considered feasible for logistical and cost reasons.

However, such eligible children, following an application for transport within the prescribed time limits, receive a Remote Area Grant towards the cost of private transport arrangements. I understand that for the 2017/18 school year, nationally 327 children for whom an application was made within the time limits, are to receive this grant.

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

Schools Building Projects

25. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which the school building programme already announced is proceeding in line with expectations nationally and throughout County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14457/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department’s Capital Programme (2016-2021) continues to address the challenges posed by the significant bulge in pupil enrolments going through our schools. This has seen a significant expansion in the rate of provision of new school places. The Capital Programme details the school projects that are being progressed through the architectural planning process, including those schools in County Kildare.

We are building more schools and providing more additional school places than ever before. This reflects the priority which this Government is putting on Education. We have doubled the number of school places being provided from 8,900 in 2010 to 18,000 in 2017. We have also increased the number of large scale project completions from 25 in 2010 to 50 in 2016 and 46 in 2017. Since 2011, some 340 major school projects and over 120,000 new and replacement places have been provided.

In addition, there are currently a total of 52 large scale projects under construction while a further 11 major projects with approval to advance to tender and construction are expected to commence on site shortly. A further 22 large scale projects are due to commence tendering over the coming months and are expected to start on site during 2018. That represents a total of 85 projects either under construction or progressing to commence construction in 2018. Over 80% of our school capital allocation has to be expended on the delivery of large scale projects and the additional accommodation scheme.

The Department is managing the school building programme in a manner that ensures that school projects in the architectural process are delivered as quickly as possible. There are a number of factors however such as difficulties with acquiring sites and issues arising in the planning process that have impacted on the pace of progress of projects announced. These issues are in the majority of cases outside the Department's control. The Department is in ongoing liaison directly with each of these schools in relation to the ongoing progression of their projects in the architectural and planning process.

My Department is satisfied that the €8.4 billion investment in the National Development Plan (2018-2027) is sufficient to deliver the necessary school infrastructure over the next decade.

School Funding

26. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to restore the capitation grant to primary schools to €200 per pupil; his views on whether choosing not to do so will result in schools continuing to have to fundraise and to seek donations from parents and other sources; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14274/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I recognise the need to improve capitation funding for schools having regard to the reductions that were necessary over recent years. The first cuts to capitation were announced in October 2010 by the then Minister for Finance. Restoring capitation funding as resources permit is one of the actions included in the Action Plan for Education.

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

The process is underway for restoring grant funding that is used by schools to fund the salaries of ancillary staff. The ancillary grant was increased by €6 in 2016, €5 in 2017 and €5 in 2018, in order to enable primary schools to implement the arbitration salary increase for grant funded school secretaries and caretakers and to also implement the restoration of salary for cleaners arising from the unwinding of FEMPI legislation.

The level of fundraising activities is a matter for each Board of Management.

Student Grant Scheme

27. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to address the issue of the calculation via the shortest distance which involves using rural roads in poor repair in the matter of the calculation of adjacent and non-adjacent third level grants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14427/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Maintenance grants under the Student Grant Scheme are awarded either at the non-adjacent rate or the adjacent rate, depending on the distance between the applicant's normal residence and the college attended. To qualify for the higher non-adjacent rate, a student has to be living more than 45kms from college.

The current qualifying distance of 45km for the higher non-adjacent rate of student grant

takes into account a reasonable radius within which students may commute on a daily basis.

The measurement of the distances relating to the award of adjacent or non-adjacent rates of student grant is a matter for the relevant grant awarding authority. The distance measurement for student grant rates is governed by Article 27(3)(a) and (b) of the Student Grant Scheme 2017. This provides that the relevant distance will be measured in line with agreed guidelines.

The guidelines require that the shortest most direct route between the applicant's normal residence and the institution being attended should apply. In determining the shortest most direct route, the relevant awarding authority shall establish:

- the method for measuring a route; and
- the factors to be taken into account in establishing and measuring a route.

School Accommodation Provision

28. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application for funding by a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14270/18]

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

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

Schools Building Projects Status

29. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the development of a new school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14388/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school to which the Deputy refers is at an advanced stage of the tender process. The school was recently authorized to issue the Letter of Intent to the preferred tenderer. Subject to no issues arising it is anticipated that construction will commence in the second quarter of 2018.

Schools Building Projects Status

30. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the action he will take for a school (details supplied) which has been vandalised; and the timeframe for construction of a new school which is planned on the site. [14349/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am pleased to advise the Deputy that the project for the new school building for the school in question, is currently at tender stage with the issuing of tenders on 9th March 2018. The award of the contract and commencement of construction will follow, and this is anticipated to be in quarter 3 of this year.

Regarding the vandalism referred to by the Deputy, the position is that the site will not be

transferring to the Department's ownership and therefore its security is consequently a matter for the Patron/Parish as its owners. This has been outlined to the Patron's representatives at a meeting with Department officials in April 2017 and again in recent correspondence. However the demolition of the old school will form part of the building contract and will be carried out as the first phase of the construction contract once a contractor has been appointed.

Schools Building Projects Expenditure

31. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of school places created and the capital expenditure in County Offaly on school building projects since 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14282/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The capital expenditure on school building projects in County Offaly for the period from 1 January 2010 to 25 March 2018 totals over €77 million. The breakdown per year is as follows:

2010 - €9.133 million

2011 - €12.535 million

2012 - €5.659 million

2013 - €3.547 million

2014 - €11.564 million

2015 - €12.976 million

2016 - €11.760 million

2017 - €7.986 million

2018 (to 25 March) - €1.889 million

In the period 2010 to 2017, 1,765 additional permanent school places and 2,149 replacement places, giving a total of 3,914 permanent school places, were provided in County Offaly.

Student Support Schemes

32. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the provisions available for children who may not be able to transition adequately from primary to post-primary schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8925/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Transitions at all stages and levels including starting school; the move from primary to post-primary; moving between mainstream and special school settings and preparation for life after school can be a difficult time for all parents and students, including those with special educational needs.

My Department has committed to a range of actions aimed at supporting effective transition at all stages within the education system, including transition from primary to post primary. A range of resources are available to facilitate and support the transition of 6th class students, including those with special educational needs.

My Department provides for a continuum of special education provision to be made avail-

able for children with special needs, so that regardless of the level of need of the child, educational provision can be made for them.

In 2018, almost 1.8 billion will be invested in Special Education, nearly one fifth of the overall Education budget, and up 43% since 2011, providing for mainstream classroom supports, special educational needs teachers, SNAs, additional special class support, assistive technology and individual supports depending on the various needs of students at different levels of the education cycle.

A number of useful Resources are available from the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) providing advice and guidance for parents, students and schools covering the transitions between all stages of education, including the transition from primary to post-primary.

Schools use the NCCA Education Passport materials to support the reporting and transfer of pupil information at the end of sixth class, to support the dual purpose of reporting to parents and of transferring pupil information to post-primary schools once enrolment has been confirmed.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

33. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 35 of 6 December 2017, if the rebuilding of a school (details supplied) is still a priority for him. [14297/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): This project is included on the 6-year construction programme announced on 17th November 2015. The building project will provide a new 350 student post primary school with an MDVI (Multiple Disability and Visual Impairment) unit, on the site of existing school building.

Notification of Decision to grant planning permission for the school was received 18th Aug 2017 from Dublin City Council. A third party planning appeal to An Bord Pleanála has significantly delayed the project from progressing to tender stage. The Design Team appointed by my Department has submitted a detailed rebuttal of this appeal and a decision from An Bord Pleanála is awaited.

This project is currently at Stage 2B of Architectural planning - Detailed Design. The Design Team is preparing the Stage 2B submission which will be submitted to my Department on conclusion of the appeal to An Bord Pleanála. The Department wrote to the Board of Management for the school on 9th March this year with an update on the progression of the project.

DEIS Status

34. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a school (details supplied) in County Tipperary which has been awarded RAPID status has been designated DEIS status but has yet to receive DEIS funding. [14458/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As I have previously advised the Deputy, we have, for the first time, introduced an objective, statistics based model for deciding which schools merit inclusion in the DEIS Programme, so that all stakeholders can have confidence that we are targeting extra resources at those schools with the highest

concentrated levels of disadvantage. The methodology adopted to assess levels of disadvantage in schools is based on centrally held data with a uniform application across the entire school system to assess levels of disadvantage in Primary and Post-Primary schools. A detailed document explaining the methodology used in the Identification process is available on the Department's website at

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

Following the application of this model, 79 schools were identified last year as having significant levels of concentrated disadvantage to warrant inclusion in DEIS. These schools have been receiving supports under DEIS since September, 2017. The school referred to by the Deputy was not assessed as having a sufficiently high level of concentrated disadvantage such as to warrant inclusion in the DEIS programme at that time and therefore is not entitled to receive any of the related supports.

An update of the identification model is currently underway. This will take account of updated school data as provided by schools for the current school year combined with the Pobal HP Index of Deprivation, based on CSO Small Area Population statistics derived from the 2016 National Census. This will be followed by a quality assurance process after which the data will be available to my Department. This data will be used to inform policy decisions in terms of future provision in the DEIS programme, including decisions with regard to the future designation of schools identified as requiring supports.

Information and Communications Technology

35. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of primary schools using tablet devices (details supplied) in the classroom; the number that have stopped using these devices in the classroom due to control issues; the problems primary schools have experienced in respect of this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14422/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The decision to use tablet devices is a matter for the Board of Management of each school. Where the introduction of new technology is planned, consultation with members of the school community including parents is advised. The cost and other implications must be fully considered by the Boards of Management before a decision is made.

My Department does not maintain records on individual schools using mobile devices nor does it have access to the information sought on the number of schools that have stopped using these devices or the reasons.

I will shortly publish the Education (Parent and Student Charter) Bill 2016, under which schools will be required to consult with parents and students in developing a policy on the use of smart phones and tablet devices in schools.

An advice sheet on the adoption of tablets in schools is available on the Professional Development Service for Teachers Technology in Education (PDST-TIE) website which addresses areas such as what tablets can offer a school, educational considerations, purchasing considerations and software.

Under the Broadband for Schools Programme schools are provided with a portfolio of network services including security & filtering of content.

All schools are advised to have an Acceptable Usage Policy in place, which governs students' use of the internet at school and covers a wide range of issues surrounding the rights, responsibilities and privileges – as well as sanctions – connected with computer use. A suite of information, including an “AUP Generator” to assist schools is available at <https://www.web-wise.ie/aup-2/>.

The Digital Strategy for Schools has committed to €210m in funding for multi-annual ICT Infrastructure Grants to schools over the period of the Strategy. The second tranche of this funding (€30m), in respect of the 2017/2018 school year, has issued to schools.

School Curriculum

36. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the commitment to implement coding into the primary school curriculum; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14279/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department is committed to providing a primary curriculum that will enable our children to develop the computational skills that are relevant in an ever changing digital environment, of which coding is at the forefront.

Currently my Department's the PDST Technology in Education service provides training for both primary and post primary teachers in ICT which includes 'Scratch' coding. 5,800 teachers received ICT training in 2017.

Following my request as part of the Action Plan for Education to have Coding integrated into the Primary Curriculum, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) sought expressions of interest from primary schools that currently teach coding. Following this call 15 schools have been invited to share their work related to coding. Examples of this work will be published on the NCCA website this year to support other schools, in the short-term, which might be interested in the area.

The second phase of work with schools will begin in the next few months. The NCCA will work closely with schools in testing different approaches to integrating coding in the Primary Curriculum and evaluating the effectiveness of these approaches in terms of children's learning outcomes, teachers' professional learning needs, the interface between coding and the rest of the curriculum, and supports needed to implement coding.

Furthermore, a large number of schools are also running voluntary coding programmes through initiatives such as Coder Dojo (over 200 dojos in Ireland), Hour of Code, where over 200 events took place in Ireland and the annual computer programming olympiad held at Dublin City University.

Third Level Funding

37. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if funding for third level institutions will be increased in order to end the practice of charging students fees and charges for certain services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14379/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy will be aware, my Department allocates recurrent funding to the Higher Education Authority (HEA) for direct disbursement to the HEA designated higher education institutions. The HEA allo-

cates this funding as a block grant to the institutions included.

However, as autonomous bodies, the internal disbursement of this funding including the determination of the fee rate applicable for certain services is a matter for the Governing Authority of each institution.

Higher education is a central part of our plan as a Government to support a strong economy and deliver a fair society. The Report of the Expert Group on Future Funding (Cassells Report) which was published in July 2016, clearly outlines the funding challenges in the higher education sector and offers a number of potential policy approaches for consideration.

Teachers' Professional Development

38. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to provide continuous professional development for second level teachers in respect of the teaching and learning of computer science at second level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14419/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) has prepared a comprehensive continuous professional development (CPD) programme to support the 40 schools selected to participate in Phase 1 of the implementation of Computer Science as a Leaving Certificate subject. This CPD programme, which will be implemented over the coming two and a half years, is guided by key underpinning principles of effective CPD required to support the introduction and embedding of a new subject. It comprises a range of CPD supports as part of a sustained professional learning pathway to equip those teachers nominated by the schools to lead the implementation of Computer Science in 5th Year from September, 2018.

These supports comprise a series of national professional learning seminars, regionally based clusters, specific skills based workshops, webinars and access to relevant online resources known as MOOCs. These professional learning supports aim to assist schools in becoming fully familiar with the Computer Science specification and enable them to draw upon a range of exemplar resources and pedagogic approaches towards high-quality practical classroom implementation, meaningful learning experiences for students and preparation for the practical coursework and final examination for certification in 2020. The PDST will also provide professional support for the school leaders of these 40 schools towards assisting them to facilitate the effective introduction and implementation of this new subject in their schools.

The supports required to facilitate schools in Phase 2 of the implementation of Computer Science will also be a key focus of my Department in the coming months.

Garda Vetting of Personnel

39. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when he plans to resolve the deficiencies in the vetting regime for special needs assistants in view of the difficulties this is causing for children with special education needs and their families; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14275/18]

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 re-

quirements 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 SNAs undertaking recurring substitute employment in a particular school.

A Frequently Asked Questions document was also published by my Department to assist schools with queries in respect of the circular.

Schools Building Projects Status

40. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the provision of additional secondary school places in south County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14428/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Projects are currently being progressed in respect of four schools in the South Kildare area. A building project for St. Conleth's Community College is currently on site and the project is expected to be completed in time for the commencement of the academic year in September, 2018. Also, a building project for St Paul's Secondary School, Monasterevin is currently at Stage 2(b) of the architectural planning process.

In addition, building projects for Athy Community College and Cross and Passion Secondary School, Kilcullen are included in my Department's Capital Programme. In the context of progressing the building projects, my Department has undertaken site visits to the schools.

The building project for Athy Community College 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.

Additional capacity in the region of 1,700 school places will be provided when projects at these four schools are completed.

Schools Building Projects Status

41. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a school (details supplied) will be signed off; and when it will open in view of the collapse of the main contractor. [14459/18]

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.

Technological Universities

42. **Deputy Hildegarde Naughton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way in which the mission of technological universities is to drive regional development and jobs growth and meet the skills needs of the regions. [14280/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Technological Universities Act 2018 is a transformative piece of legislation and I am very pleased that it is now enacted. The TU Act underpins the development of a new type of higher education institution, building on the strengths and mission of institutes of technology to develop world class technological universities.

The mission and vision for each of the individual proposed technological universities will be developed by the consortia of Institutes of Technology who are engaged with the process seeking to become designated as Technological Universities. This will be done in consultation with stakeholders, including staff and students, and the mission and vision will be contained in the implementation plans subsequently developed.

Technological Universities will be able to deliver a range of disciplines and levels of qualification, including apprenticeships, to meet the skills needs of the regions in which they are situated, and importantly, retain talent in the regions.

Along with their mission to develop our human resources to ensure that vital skills are available to make the most of economic and employment opportunities, the Technological Universities will engage in research and innovation, all of which are key to economic development and jobs growth in the regions.

The new Technological Universities will each have a strong regional mission to support development and innovation in line with the Government's Project Ireland 2040. I think that this represents an enormous opportunity for the regions in which the TUs are located and has the potential to be a driver of regional development and to retain jobs in regions.

Technological Universities will be institutions of scale and increased capacity to compete regionally, nationally and internationally. They will have a strong role to play in facilitating

lifelong learning, upskilling and reskilling to support career development for citizens throughout their lives. Their scale and coherent branding will enable them to increase their internationalisation activities including attracting more international students and increasing mobility opportunities for Irish students and staff.

They will create the capacity for greater engagement with local enterprises, particularly Small and Medium Enterprises and will support innovation, management upskilling and internationalisation of companies.

They will be able to undertake globally significant research and innovation that supports competitiveness and nurtures new business ideas; creating a regional research capacity. They will be a key selling point in the attraction, retention and development of Foreign Direct Investment in the regions.

They will build on the existing mission of the Institutes of Technology and have a greater capacity for social and community engagements that can include placements, research and innovation, work with schools, cultural and sporting activities.

Schools Building Projects Status

43. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress that has been made on finalising the project brief for a school (details supplied) and having it progressed into architectural planning process. [14348/18]

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.

The process of acquiring a suitable site to facilitate the proposed building project has been completed. The project brief is now being finalised. This is part of the preparatory work required to facilitate the progression of the project into the architectural planning process and my Department will be in further contact with the school in this regard.

Teaching Qualifications

44. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether the six-year route to qualifying as a second level teacher is too long. [14449/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): There are two routes to the teaching profession at post primary level, concurrent (undergraduate) and consecutive (post-graduate) programmes of initial teacher education (ITE). All ITE programmes in Ireland that lead to registration with the Teaching Council must have professional accreditation from the Council.

Teachers qualifying through the undergraduate route typically complete a four year level 8 ITE programme. I have announced 280 extra places on these courses for September 2018. I welcome that there has been a 4 % increase in the number of students applying for these courses.

Teachers qualifying through the postgraduate route will have completed a level 8 degree and a two year Professional Masters in Education. I have announced 100 extra places on these courses for September 2018.

Changes to initial teacher education were recommended in the National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020 and were incorporated into the Teaching Council's Policy Paper on the Continuum of Teacher Education and Criteria and Guidelines for Programme Providers. Both were published in 2011.

The changes made to post graduate ITE programmes included the reconfiguration of their content and an increase in their duration to two years. The increased duration allows for substantial periods of school placement, which is central to student teacher development, and a number of mandatory elements such as Literacy & Numeracy, Adolescent Learning and Teaching, Learning and Assessment.

The changes made to the content and duration of the initial teacher education programmes for post primary teaching are in line with the aims of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy and aim to ensure that newly qualified teachers are better equipped for the needs of modern day classroom.

The Deputy may wish to note that earlier this week I convened the first meeting of the Teacher Supply Steering Group, which is chaired by the Secretary General of my Department.

The Group will consider the issues that impact on teacher supply, including the length of ITE programmes, and oversee a programme of actions according to strict timelines and clear deliverables to meet important needs. In undertaking its task, the Group will be cognisant of the requirement that all persons wishing to teach in recognised schools must meet the professional registration standards and criteria set by the Teaching Council, which is the professional regulatory body for the teaching.

School Accommodation

45. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a school (details supplied) will move to a new premises; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14415/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that a project for the school in question is included in my Department's 6 Year Construction Programme.

My Department has advised the Patron of the school in question that with the agreement of Kildare Wicklow Education Training Board (KWETB), the school will be co-located with the Bray Institute of Further Education (BIFE). In this regard, my Department is engaging with KWETB in the context of progressing a development on the BIFE campus.

Institutes of Technology

46. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the process and timescale by which the Institute of Technology, Sligo, will become a member of a technological university consortium; the way in which he views IT Sligo will make a greater contribution to the economic development of its region following the enactment of the Technological Universities Bill 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14362/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Technological Universities (TUs) will have a strong regional mission to support economic development and innovation. They will be able to deliver a range of disciplines and levels of qualification, including appren-

ticeships, to meet the skills needs of the regions in which they are situated, retain talent in the regions and contribute to national priorities. They will create the capacity for greater engagement with local enterprises, particularly Small and Medium Enterprises and will support innovation, management upskilling and internationalisation of companies.

There are currently four consortia of Institutes of Technology engaged with the developmental process seeking to become designated as technological universities. I am pleased to be able to confirm to the Deputy that IT Sligo is a member of the Connaught Ulster Alliance (CUA) consortium seeking technological university status along with Letterkenny IT and Galway Mayo IT.

The CUA consortium submitted an expression of interest for designation as a Technological University in March 2015 and in October 2015 they were approved to proceed to the next stage of the process which involves the development of a plan to meet the TU criteria.

To date the HEA has provided the CUA consortium with just over €2.1m in funding to advance their TU project. The HEA has recently issued a further call for proposals and it is open to the CUA consortium to apply for further support in response to this call.

The recently enacted Technological Universities Act 2018 sets out the eligibility criteria and the application process whereby consortia of applicant institutes of technology may jointly apply to the Minister for Education and Skills for an order establishing a Technological University. The various consortia are at different stages of development, dependent on their particular circumstances. It is a matter for the Institutes of Technology in a consortium to lead on the progression of their plans to seek designation as a Technological University. My understanding is that the CUA consortium is progressing work in a number of different respects to develop its application for TU designation but that, as yet, no firm date for the submission of such an application has been set.

Capitation Grants

47. Deputy Thomas Byrne asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether schools are generally in severe financial difficulties; and if an increase in capitation rates will be ensured. [14453/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I recognise the need to improve capitation funding for schools having regard to the reductions that were necessary over recent years. The first cuts to capitation were announced in October 2010 by the then Minister for Finance. Restoring capitation funding as resources permit is one of the actions included in the Action Plan for Education.

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

The process is underway for restoring grant funding that is used by schools to fund the salaries of ancillary staff. The ancillary grant was increased by €6 in 2016, €5 in 2017 and €5 in 2018, in order to enable primary schools to implement the arbitration salary increase for grant funded school secretaries and caretakers and to also implement the restoration of salary for cleaners arising from the unwinding of FEMPI legislation. A similar type approach in relation to improvements in grant funding was applied, as appropriate, at post-primary level.

Schools Facilities

48. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the recent efforts he has made to assist a school (details supplied) in its ongoing campaign to ensure the future of its playing pitches; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14273/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I understand that a legal case is currently being taken against the Christian Brother Congregation regarding the sale of land in question. It would be inappropriate for me as Minister to comment on cases before the Courts.

The Deputy will also be aware that I have received a request from the Patron of the school concerned to approve the dissolution of the Board of Management.

The statutory process of dissolution is underway in which I, as Minister, must make a decision having considered the submissions made to me.

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

I will however make a decision in due course having considered all aspects of the dissolution in keeping with my statutory function.

Scoileanna Oileáin

49. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den an Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna an bhfuil sé i gceist aige beartas oideachais speisialta a réiteach bunaithe ar mholtaí Chomhchoiste Oideachais agus Scileanna an Oireachtais; má tá, cén uair a fhoilseofar é. [14261/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Aithním na dúshláin bhreise atá ag meánscoileanna na n-oileán. Tá grúpa oibre curtha le chéile agam san Roinn chun féachaint mar chéad chéim ar riachtanais scoileanna na niar-bhunscoileanna Gaeltachta ar na hoileáin. Thosaigh obair an ghrúpa ag deireadh na bliana 2017 agus déanfar dul chun cinn leis an obair seo in 2018 tar éis don ghrúpa oibre comhairliúchán a dhéanamh leis na boird oideachais agus oiliúna ábhartha. Déanfaidh an grúpa oibre cioradh ar na saincheisteanna éagsúla chun féachaint ar chén tacaíocht gur féidir a thabhairt do na hiar-bhunscoileanna Gaeltachta ar na hoileáin chun é seo a thabhairt chun cinn.

I am aware of the additional challenges faced by post-primary schools on the islands. I have established a working group in the Department to examine in the first instance, the needs of post-primary schools in the Gaeltacht. The work of the group commenced in late 2017 and will progress in 2018 after the group has consulted with the relevant Education and Training Boards. The working group will consider the various issues and see what assistance can be provided to these schools as a way forward.

Schools Building Projects Status

50. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the timeline for the completion of a school (details supplied) in Dublin 16; and if he will make a statement on the

matter. [14374/18]

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 this 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

51. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when he expects the completion of the nationwide demographic exercises involving all school planning areas, including Tallaght, Saggart, Citywest, Newcastle and Rathcoole, which will determine the locations in which additional school accommodation will be needed in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14277/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy may be aware, in order to plan for school provision and analyse the relevant demographic data, my Department divides the country into 314 school planning areas. My Department uses a Geographical Information System to identify where the pressure for school places across the country will arise. This system uses data from a range of sources. Where demographic data indicates that additional provision is required, the delivery of such additional provision is dependent on the particular circumstances of each case and may, depending on the circumstances, be provided through either one, or a combination of, the following:

- Utilising existing unused capacity within a school or schools;
- Extending the capacity of a school or schools;
- Provision of a new school or schools.

For school planning purposes, the areas referred to by the Deputy, including Saggart and Citywest, are located within the Tallaght and Newcastle_Rathcoole school planning areas. A new 1,000 pupil post-primary in the Kingswood area of Tallaght was established in September 2016 to serve the needs of students in the Tallaght school planning area, which includes Citywest. A building project for this school commenced construction in August 2017. In addition, a new 1,000 pupil post-primary school is due to be established in September 2018 in Firhouse/Oldbawn, which is adjacent to the Tallaght area.

Nationwide demographic exercises involving all school planning areas, which will determine where additional school accommodation will be needed in the future, are currently ongoing and it is anticipated that decisions based on these exercises will be announced in the coming weeks.

School Curriculum

52. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he will take to increase the uptake of STEM, science, technology, engineering and mathematics; if schools

will be supported to modernise their science labs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14365/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The promotion of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) within our education system is a key priority for my Department and is reflected in the Action Plan for Education, which has the overall aim to make the Irish Education and training system the best in Europe.

Most recently, in November 2017 I launched the STEM Education Policy Statement and Implementation Plan, whose aim is that Ireland will be internationally recognised as a European leader in the provision of STEM education for learners by 2026. This Policy Statement focusses on the many strengths in STEM education in Ireland while providing a roadmap to address the areas for development. My Department is actively engaged in promoting STEM across the education system, for example through the updating of existing STEM curricula and in working with outside organisations to promote STEM among all learners. Implementation of the Policy Statement and Plan is overseen by a STEM Education Implementation Advisory Group which held its first meeting earlier this month.

Within our school system, there is an increased emphasis on STEM education, while new initiatives will continue to support greater participation and improved performance in STEM. My Department is committed to curricular reform in relation to STEM, for example:

Introduction of computer science subject at senior cycle in September 2018;

Development of a new primary mathematics curriculum which will support all children in the development of algorithmic and computational thinking to include coding;

New Science specification was introduced for junior cycle students from September 2016;

Junior Cycle Mathematics specification to be implemented from September 2018;

A quality assured programme of STEM professional development provided to early years practitioners and teachers;

All schools will provide a better teaching, learning and assessment environment in STEM education;

All schools, learners and parents have access to quality STEM career information and more opportunities to experience the diversity of STEM careers;

All learners have access to co-curricular and out of school STEM learning opportunities with a 20% increase in extra-curricular STEM activities across schools;

Robust and sustainable partnerships between schools, business and industry, public sector bodies, research organisations, further and higher-level institutions, and the wider STEM community in place;

Partnerships in place with Arts education promoting creativity, universal design and design thinking skills;

STEM awards programme in place to recognise student participation in informal and extra-curricular STEM activities and events;

In relation to infrastructure, my Department is committed to conduct an audit to identify gaps in physical infrastructure which impact on the provision of STEM education in schools and early years settings. Project Ireland 2040 underpins the programme of curricular reform which

I am implementing.

Under the National Development Plan 2018-2027, increased funding has been provided for the school sector capital investment programme. This funding will allow a continued focus on the generation of new permanent school places to keep pace with demographic demand.

Significantly, the new funding will also provide for an additional focus on refurbishment of the existing school stock. This refurbishment programme will have three strands and will benefit schools throughout the country, not just in those areas of high demographic growth:

Upgrade of labs to support the reform and modernisation of school curricula;

Build and modernisation of PE facilities in post-primary schools;

Commencement of deep energy retrofit of schools built prior to 2008.

School Enrolments

53. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he is satisfied that the primary school needs of children in the River Valley, Ridgewood and Boroimhe areas of Swords can be met in 2017 and 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14267/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Prior to the conclusion of the enrolment process in the school planning area referred to by the Deputy, representations were made to my Department indicated that there was a shortage of junior infant places for September 2017. At that time my Department, based on demographic information available, projected that 760 junior infant places were required and that the 11 schools enrolling junior infants in the area could facilitate this level of intake. While waiting lists for individual schools seemed to indicate a greater demand than that projected it was understood by my Department that these lists reflected inclusion of pupils on more than one waiting list and also included applications from parents in respect of enrolments in later years, e.g. 2018/19 etc.

I can confirm to the Deputy that the junior infant enrolment in September 2017, in the school planning area referred to was 737.

In respect of September 2018, I can advise that my Department has recently contacted all of the schools in the area to review their projected enrolments for the new academic year. The schools concerned generally commenced their enrolment process for new junior infants in early January of this year and this process is on-going. In that regard, the level of actual demand for all schools is not available at this point.

My Department will continue to liaise with the schools and to keep the matter under review in the coming weeks with a view to putting any necessary arrangements in place to address any deficits in capacity.

Nationwide demographic exercises involving all school planning areas, including the school planning area referred to, which will determine where additional school accommodation will be needed in the future is currently ongoing and this work is almost complete.

Schools Building Contractors

54. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of

the school projects that were almost completed by sub-contractors and partners of a company (details supplied); when he expects the completion of all these schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14265/18]

63. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the five schools and college involved in the collapse of a company (details supplied); if tenders have been issued; the completion date for the schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14454/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 54 and 63 together.

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 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.

School Enrolments

55. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to sanction new primary schools within the Swords area in the next 18 months; the likely location of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14266/18]

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.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

56. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if immediate funding will be provided for a school (details supplied) for necessary appointments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14268/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible, through its network of Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) for determining the appropriate staffing levels in special schools.

Enhanced pupil teacher and Special Needs Assistant (SNA) ratios are provided to special schools to support them in dealing with pupil's educational and care needs.

In accordance with Circular 0042/2011, special schools are staffed based on their actual current pupil profiles and the disability category of each pupil, as opposed to primarily by school designation, in recognition that many special schools now enroll students from disability categories other than those provided for by their original school designations.

This process means that it is for school authorities to determine its staffing requirements in accordance with the curricular requirements of the cohort of students attending the school which includes how best to use that resource to cater for art, drama, music and indeed other curricular content.

When making decisions on staff recruitment, special schools should consider that a primary teacher is qualified to teach the full range of subjects as set out in the Primary School Curriculum, whereas a post-primary qualified teacher is usually a specialist in a limited number of subject areas. Arts education, which is part of the current primary curriculum, encompasses a range of activities in the visual arts, music, drama, dance and literature.

I regret that no additional teaching allocation can be made to facilitate the changes proposed by the school.

DEIS is my Department's main policy initiative to tackle educational disadvantage and in particular concentrated levels of disadvantage and is only available in mainstream schools. The rationale for allocating resources and supports based on a schools' level of concentrated disadvantage is based on the existence of a 'multiplier effect' whereby students attending a school where disadvantage is concentrated have poorer academic outcomes.

The Home School Community Liaison scheme is an initiative which is specific to DEIS schools in recognition of the support required to break down barriers experienced by children from socio-economic backgrounds in both attending and participating in mainstream education through the meaningful engagement of parents.

The provision of therapy interventions such as play, music and drama therapy are not within the remit of my Department.

School Patronage

57. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if restrictions on Educate Together national schools admissions will be ceased in view of his position of supporting parental choice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14380/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): A case was submitted by Educate Together to my Department in relation to enrolment levels at five schools under its patronage, opened under the patronage divesting process - Tramore ETNS, New Ross ETNS,

Trim ETNS, Tuam ETNS and Castlebar ETNS.

My Department considered the case put forward by Educate Together in relation to each of the five divested schools, both on the practicalities of each particular situation and in the broader policy context, and met with Educate Together on 16th March in this regard.

At the meeting both parties reiterated their commitment to work together to increase diversity of school provision in line with the needs of the communities in these areas. While it was acknowledged that this needs to be managed within the constraints of the accommodation that can be made available and recognising that these are areas of stable demographics, the five schools, taking the above into account, can be facilitated to develop over time.

In this regard, my Department wrote to Educate Together on 23rd March, indicating responses in relation to each school, dependent on the availability of permanent or temporary accommodation in each case. Essentially, these schools can be facilitated to develop over time but enrolment in each school will need to be managed within the constraints of the accommodation that can be made available.

I have announced a new Patronage Reconfiguration process, which will accelerate the delivery of multi-denominational and non-denominational schools, to reach 400 live schools by 2030. Unlike the previous process, this plan will focus on live transfers, so that a school which transfers under this process will not be reliant on permanent or temporary accommodation becoming available over time.

Third Level Fees

58. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether there should be a move towards the elimination of all third level education fees in the interest of ensuring accessibility for all to further education (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14272/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy will be aware, my Department allocates recurrent funding to the Higher Education Authority (HEA) for direct disbursement to the HEA designated higher education institutions. The HEA allocates this funding as a block grant to the institutions.

However, as autonomous bodies, the internal disbursement of this funding, including the determination of the fee rate applicable for individual students, for example in relation to re-sitting examinations, is a matter for the Governing Authority of each institution.

Higher education is a central part of our plan as a Government to support a strong economy and deliver a fair society. The Report of the Expert Group on Future Funding (Cassells Report) which was published in July 2016, clearly outlines the funding challenges in the higher education sector and offers a number of potential policy approaches for consideration.

While Cassells deals with the medium and long term funding needs of higher education we also have to consider the immediate challenges. In advance of receiving the recommendations of the joint committee, the government has moved to increase funding into the sector. We have therefore prioritised this area in Budgets 2017 and 2018.

As a result, my Department is investing €100m more in higher education in 2018 compared to 2016. Separate to this is the provision which I have made for pay restoration costs in 2018. We will seek to build on this progress in Budget 2019.

As part of Budget 2018, the Government decided to raise the National Training Fund levy by 0.1% in 2018 to 0.8%, and by a further 0.1% in both 2019 and 2020 (subject to the reform of the NTF to make it more transparent and to afford employers greater opportunity to inform the NTF expenditure priorities). The increase in funding from the National Training Fund is a key strategic element of the overall funding increase for higher and further education.

In addition, in January 2018 I published an independent review of the current allocation model for funding higher education. This review provides a roadmap for transitioning towards a reformed funding model that is more transparent, consistent across higher education institutions, incentivises actions in key strategic areas such as research and STEM provision, and supports improved accountability while also respecting institutional autonomy.

This comprehensive approach is being taken in order to contribute to the development of a long-term sustainable funding model for the sector. As such, it will be important to build broad political and societal consensus on achieving the most appropriate future funding model and my Department and I continue to work to that end.

Teachers' Remuneration

59. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a clear path to pay equality for newly qualified teachers will be in place. [14450/18]

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

As a result of these changes, the current starting salary of a new teacher is €35,958 and from 1 October 2020 onwards will be €37,692.

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

Differential pay scales were introduced by the then Government in 2010. It must be borne in mind that the pay reduction for post-2011 entrants applied to all public servants and not just teachers, and that any restoration of these measures in respect of teachers would be expected to be applied elsewhere across the public service.

In accordance with the Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform recently laid before the Oireachtas a report on the matter of the pay of new entrants to the public service. The report assesses the cost of a further change which would provide a two scale point adjustment to new entrants recruited since 2011. The total cost of such an adjustment across the public sector is of the order of €200 million, of which Education accounts for €83 million. The report also acknowledges that during the financial crisis there were policy changes which affected remuneration in different occupations across the public sector (including education). Addressing any issues arising from changes which are not specifically detailed in the report would give rise to additional costs over and above the foregoing figures.

Any further negotiation on new entrant pay is a cross sectorial issue, not just an issue for the education sector. The Government also supports the gradual, negotiated repeal of the FEMPI

legislation, having due regard to the priority to improve public services and in recognition of the essential role played by public servants.

The Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform's report will inform discussion on remaining salary scale issues with the parties to the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 in accordance with the commitment in the Agreement to consider the issue of newly qualified pay. That process commenced with a first meeting on 12 October 2017. The three teacher unions attended that first meeting.

Severe Weather Events Response

60. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the measures and policies his Department has in place in respect of making up for lost school days incurred during Storm Emma; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14421/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department's guidance for schools in relation to making up for time lost due to unforeseen closures is set out in Circular 0009/2017 Standardisation of the School Year in respect of Primary & Post-Primary Schools for the years 2017/18, 2018/19 and 2019/20 which is available on my Department's website www.education.gov.ie

As outlined in Circular 0009/2017 flexibility is given to schools to make up for time lost due to unforeseen circumstances including severe weather instances such as Storm Emma. Examples of how this might be achieved subject to consensus at local level include prioritising tuition over non-tuition activities, consideration of whether learning in the classroom should be prioritised over school tours, etc. and reducing where possible the length of mock/house examinations.

Apprenticeship Programmes

61. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the implementation of the apprenticeship and traineeship plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14363/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): The Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship in Ireland 2016-2020 sets out a series of detailed actions and annual targets on how the expansion commitments in the area set out in the Action Plan for Education will be met. Over the lifetime of the plan we will see 50,000 learners register on apprenticeship and traineeship programmes. This represents a more than doubling of activity by 2020.

This Government is committed to expanding the apprenticeship model into new sectors of the economy. To date, 11 new apprenticeship programmes have been developed, following the Apprenticeship Council's first call for proposals in 2015. These new programmes span a variety of sectors ranging from financial services, ICT to hospitality. Further new apprenticeships are to be submitted to Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) for validation shortly and, subject to successful validation, will get underway in 2018. In addition, a key commitment in our plan for last year was to issue a second call for apprenticeship proposals to refresh the pipeline of apprenticeship proposals established through the first call. Arising from our second call a further 26 new programmes have now been approved for further development into national apprenticeships in various sectors including construction, engineering, horticulture and agriculture.

As well as developments in new apprenticeships, as the employment and economic situation continues to improve, we have seen strong growth in registrations across the craft trades nationally during 2017 with 4,508 at year end, which represents a 20% increase on 2016.

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

A new Five-Step Guide to traineeship has been developed which is aimed at employers seeking practical information on how to develop a traineeship within their company. The guide provides practical information on what a traineeship is; how employers and prospective trainees can access traineeship programmes; information on current traineeship opportunities, and the five-step process to developing a new traineeship.

School Funding

62. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application for funding by a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14269/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department received an application from the school in question for temporary classrooms to accommodate two additional teacher appointments in September 2018. My Department has recently conveyed approval in principle for this accommodation to the school.

The school has also submitted an application for significant capital funding for major building works. The application will be considered and a decision will be conveyed to the school authority as soon as this process has been completed. The school principal has been advised of the position.

Question No. 63 answered with Question No. 54.

School Enrolments

64. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he is taking to ensure that there is an adequate number of primary school places in Greystones, County Wicklow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14429/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): 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:

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- Utilising existing unused capacity within a school or schools;
- Extending the capacity of a school or schools;
- Provision of a new school or schools.

Stádas Scoile

65. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den an Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna cén uair a dhéanfar cinneadh ar iarratas scoile chun bheith aitheanta mar mheánscoil neamhspleách (son-raí tugtha). [14262/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Tá coiste athbhreithnithe bunaithe chun athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar an soláthar oideachais ar fud scoileanna ar oileáin. Tá an obair seo ag an gcéim thosaigh a bhaineann lena forbairt agus déanfar í a chur chun cinn in 2018. Beidh an Roinn i dteagmháil leis na páirtithe ábhartha, an t-údarás scoile dá dtagraítear ina measc.

DEIS Review

66. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when decisions will be made on an updated DEIS school supports programme following a review of schools' entitlements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14416/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that the update of the identification model is continuing. This will take account of updated school data as provided by schools for the current school year combined with the Pobal HP Index of Deprivation, based on CSO Small Area Population statistics derived from the 2016 National Census. It is envisaged that this process including a quality assurance exercise will be completed in the coming weeks. Once this data is available to my Department, it will be used to inform policy decisions in terms of future provision in the DEIS programme, including decisions with regard to the future designation of schools identified as requiring supports.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

67. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the delays in assessments for children attending school who have developmental issues and may require specialised support; the efforts being made to clear this backlog; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14389/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can inform the Deputy that my Department introduced a new model to support pupils with special educational needs in our schools following a pilot which demonstrated strong support from principals, teachers and parents. The new model differs significantly from the old Resource Allocation Model, as schools are now front-loaded with additional resources based on the profile of each individual school. This means that the Department has allocated special education teaching support directly to schools to enable them to respond to pupil needs without having to wait for an assessment to allow them to apply for additional resources. School can now respond to individual need in a flexible way and pupils do not have to have a psychological assessment or a diagnosis of a disability in order to access Special Education Teaching. It also means that those with high-

est level of need can access the highest level of support within the school. Medical or psychological assessments will still be used to assess a child's needs, or the nature of difficulties they may have. However, an assessment, or diagnosis, will no longer be needed to access additional teaching support in schools.

I can inform the Deputy that my Department's National Educational Psychological Service provides educational psychological support to all primary and post-primary schools. This involves direct support in the event of a critical incident, access to national and regional support and development work to build school capacity to support students, access to a NEPS psychologist for responses to queries arising, and access to individual pupil casework via a NEPS psychologist or through the Scheme for the Commissioning of Psychological Assessments. (SCPA).

In common with many other psychological services and best international practice, NEPS has adopted a consultative model of service. The focus is on empowering teachers to intervene effectively with pupils whose needs range from mild to severe and transient to enduring. Psychologists use a problem solving and solution oriented consultative approach to maximise positive outcomes for these pupils. NEPS encourages schools to use a continuum based assessment and intervention process whereby each school takes responsibility for initial assessment, educational planning and remedial intervention for pupils with learning, emotional or behavioural difficulties. Teachers may consult their NEPS psychologist should they need to at this stage in the process. Only in the event of a failure to make reasonable progress, in spite of the school's best efforts in consultation with NEPS, will the psychologist become involved with an individual child for intensive intervention or assessment.

This system allows psychologists to give early attention to urgent cases and also to help many more children indirectly than could be seen individually. It also ensures that children are not referred unnecessarily for psychological intervention.

I would advise that if there are concerns in relation to the educational or social and emotional development of any student these should be raised by the parents, in the first instance, with the Principal of the school he/she is attending, with a view to Principal discussing the situation with the assigned NEPS psychologist or local NEPS service.

Schools Building Projects Status

68. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the timeframe for the opening of a school (details supplied) in County Wicklow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14414/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The schools referred to by the Deputy form 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 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.

Regional Development Policy

69. **Deputy Hildegard Naughton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps his Department is taking to promote and drive regional development. [14281/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Education and training has been critical to Ireland's transformation over recent decades and central to sustaining economic success and building strong communities. My Department will support the measures outlined throughout the National Planning Framework Ireland 2040 which notes that "Strategic planning of and investment in the provision of childcare, education and training are central to reinforcing the delivery of sustainable communities, promoting inclusion and offering choice and accessibility to a high standard of education and employment".

The National Planning Framework seeks to prioritise the alignment of targeted and planned population and employment growth with educational investment in the following:

A childcare/ECCE planning function, for monitoring, analysis and forecasting of investment needs, including identification of regional priorities.

The provision of childcare facilities and new and refurbished schools on well located sites within or close to existing built-up areas that meet the diverse needs of local populations.

The expansion and consolidation of Higher Education facilities, particularly where this will contribute to wider regional development.

Programmes for life-long learning, especially in areas of higher education and further education and training where skills gaps are identified through sources such as the Regional Skills Fora.

In the Higher Education sector, the development of Technological Universities will drive Regional jobs growth and economic development.

In addition my Department will continue to deliver and develop measures under the National Skills Strategy 2025 and the Action Plan for Education 2016-2019 that aim to promote and drive regional development. My Department has already established nine Regional Skills Fora and will continue to support wider Government policy and initiatives on regional economic development, including the Regional Action Plans for Jobs and the Action Plan for Rural Development.

Commemorative Medals

70. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if certificates will be issued to the families of those who received a medal of honour for services during the War of Independence in cases in which the medal itself has subsequently been lost or stolen; the way

in which a family in such circumstances can apply for a certificate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14510/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Department of Defence receives requests from time to time for the replacement of lost, stolen or destroyed medals awarded to Veterans of the 1916 Rising and the War of Independence. In relation to such requests, it has been settled policy for many years that replacement medals were issued on a once-off only basis on receipt of a *bona-fidé* request from the Veteran to whom the original medals were awarded. This policy was adopted in the interest of preserving the intrinsic value of the medals and to strictly limit the number of medals issued in any particular case. Although all of the Veterans are now deceased, the rationale for restricting the issue of replacement medals is still valid. Apart from the intrinsic value of the medals, their monetary value on the open market is also a factor.

In 2006, the then Minister for Defence decided that, where 1916 Rising/War of Independence medals had been lost, stolen or destroyed, official certificates, in both Irish and English, would be issued in such cases confirming that the relevant medal(s) was/were awarded to the named Veteran. The procedure in such cases is that the family can obtain an application form from the Pensions Administration Section of the Department of Defence in Áras an tSáile, Renmore, Galway, H91 AN2E (telephone - 091 743899 or email – *pensions.admin@defence.ie*). Once the form is completed and returned to the Department, the details will be verified by the Department and, if in order, the relevant certificate/s will be issued (generally to the next of kin) on a once-off basis.

Departmental Staff Training

71. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the amount that his Department has spent on social media training and consultancy in each year since 2016. [14565/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): There has not been any expenditure in my Department in relation to social media training and consultancy as outlined in the Deputy's question.

Departmental Staff Training

72. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if training has been delivered in his Department on the use of social media (details supplied); the frequency and cost of this training; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14581/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): No training has been supplied in my Department in relation to social media in respect of the organisations outlined in the Deputy's question.

Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

73. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the value of contracts for services awarded to a company (details supplied) by his Department since 2010, in tabular form; and the type of work undertaken by the company. [14626/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): In the period since 2010 my Department has no record of having awarded any contracts to the company referred to by the Deputy.

Defence Forces Strength

74. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the most up-to-date figures for the strength of the Permanent Defence Forces with regard to all three services and all ranks; the gender breakdown of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14697/18]

76. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of additional recruits the Permanent Defence Forces have taken on to date in 2018 with regard to all three services; the gender breakdown of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14699/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 74 and 76 together.

As of the 28th February, 2018 (the latest date for which figures are available), the whole time equivalent strength of the Permanent Defence Force, across all three services and ranks, broken down by gender was as follows: -

Service	Total Personnel	Female Personnel
Army	7,281	490
Naval Service	1,046	68
Air Corps	730	33
Total	9,057	591

To return to, and maintain, the agreed strength levels, significant targeted recruitment took place in 2017 and has now commenced for 2018. A total of 751 personnel were inducted in 2017; of which 73 (9.72%) were female.

Two Direct Entry Medical Officers (1 Male, 1 Female) and a Direct Entry Naval Service Officer (Male) have been inducted in 2018. It is anticipated that in the region of 800 personnel, comprising of General Service Recruits, Apprentices, Cadets and Direct Entry Officers will be recruited to the Permanent Defence Force in 2018.

Current competitions consist of:

- A General Service Recruitment Competition, commenced on 26th March 2018 and closes on 22nd April 2018.

- An Air Corps Apprentice Aircraft Technician Competition, commenced on 3rd March 2018 and closes on 25th May 2018.

- A competition for Cadets is due to launch very shortly.

I remain committed to maximising recruitment of capable personnel, developing serving personnel, and so achieving the best personnel and skills combination to ensure the Defence Forces retain the capacity to operate effectively across all roles required of them by government.

Defence Forces Reserve Strength

75. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the most up-to-date figures for the strength of the Reserve Defence Forces with regard to all three services and all ranks; the gender breakdown of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14698/18]

77. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of additional recruits the Reserve Defence Forces have taken on to date in 2018 with regard to all services; the gender breakdown of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14700/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 75 and 77 together.

As of 28th February 2018 (the latest date for which figures are available), the effective strength of the Reserve Defence Force (Army Reserve and Naval Service Reserve) was as follows:

Service	Total Effective Personnel	Female Personnel
Army Reserve	1,653	232
Naval Service Reserve	124	21
Total	1,777	253

I am aware that there is a shortfall between these figures and those of the establishment, which provides for 4,069 personnel. The most recent recruitment campaign for the Army Reserve and Naval Service Reserve began in July 2017 and attracted 1,221 applications, of which 162 were female applicants. A total of 139 new recruits were inducted into the RDF in 2017, of which 10 were female. To date in 2018, 38 personnel have been inducted to the Reserve Defence Force, of which 4 are female. There are plans to launch the next Reserve recruitment campaign in the 2nd quarter of 2018.

I would like to assure the Deputy that I remain committed to the ongoing development of the RDF within the framework set out in the White Paper on Defence.

Question No. 76 answered with Question No. 74.

Question No. 77 answered with Question No. 75.

Army Bomb Disposals Data

78. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of suspect devices that the Army disposal unit has dealt with to date in 2018, by county in tabular form. [14701/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Department of Justice and Equality and An Garda Síochána have primary responsibility for the internal security of the State. Among the roles assigned to the Defence Forces in the White Paper on Defence is the provision of Aid to the Civil Power which, in practice, means to assist An Garda Síochána when requested to do so. The Defence Forces Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) teams respond when a request for assistance is made by An Garda Síochána in dealing with a suspect device. The number of EOD callouts, which include viable devices, hoaxes, false alarms, post-blast analysis and the removal of unstable chemicals in laboratories dealt with up

to date in 2018, by county, are set out in the following tabular statement:

County	Number
Dublin	5
Kildare	3
Clare	1
Louth	1
Wicklow	1
Tipperary	1
Sligo	1
Monaghan	1
Kerry	1
Galway	1
Total	16

Naval Service Operations

79. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of days spent at sea by members of the Naval Service Reserve in 2017 and to date in 2018. [14702/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The number of days spent at sea by members of the Naval Service Reserve in 2017 and 2018 to-date is as follows:

Year	Sea Days
2017	167 days
2018	Nil to date

Overseas Development Aid

80. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on a proposal by an organisation (details supplied). [14918/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): Ireland has consistently been recognised by the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) for the quality of our aid programme and the emphasis we place on achieving results for the poor, particularly in least developed countries. The OECD DAC has also commended Ireland for its consistent record on, and commitment to untied aid. The Government's policy for international development, *One World One Future*, reaffirms our commitment to providing "aid that is not conditional on the procurement of goods and services from Ireland". Ireland's aid to developing countries continues to be untied and our long term commitment to untied aid remains firm.

Ireland does however recognise that the private sector has the potential to have a transformative impact on the world's poor. Over the last decade, companies and investors have become more engaged in addressing development problems, largely through corporate social responsibility (CSR) and philanthropy initiatives, particularly in Least Developed Countries. Ireland provides support to countries to develop an enabling environment for the private sector to achieve both inclusive and sustainable economic development. Some of the €165 million

provided by the Irish Government to Non-Governmental Organisations in 2016 was used to promote an enabling environment for private sector development. This funding equated to 23% of Ireland's official ODA contribution for that year.

In addition, a joint initiative between the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine – the African Agri-Food Development Programme (AADP) provides opportunities for the Irish Agri-food sector to link with their counterparts in sub-Saharan Africa. Through this programme partnerships are being developed supporting sustainable growth of the local food industry, building markets for local produce and supporting mutual trade between Ireland and Africa.

Additionally, Irish development cooperation funding is also targeted to the improvement of the business climate in our key partner countries, for example Ireland's partnership with the World Bank in Mozambique assisting the local Ministry for Industry and Commerce remove barriers for business activity. Similarly, Irish Aid has assisted the creation of an accountancy training body in Mozambique, in partnership with the Institute of Certified Public Accountants of Ireland, developing an essential human resource base for both the public and private sectors.

In addition to our aid programme, Irish Embassies in developing countries work closely with Irish business, supporting them to increase investment and trade with partner countries, creating jobs and contributing to development and innovation. We will continue to support this work, while maintaining our commitment to untied aid. This work is both in our interest and that of the countries where we have a presence.

Undocumented Irish in the USA

81. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of efforts being made on the needs of the undocumented Irish in the United States of America in view of his St. Patrick's Day visit to the United States of America; the extent to which ongoing negotiations continue to take place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14547/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The long-standing tradition of meetings at the highest level in Washington DC around St. Patrick's Day affords Ireland a unique opportunity to engage with the US Administration and Congressional leaders at the highest level on issues of particular interest to Ireland, including immigration reform. For many years now, during the annual St. Patrick's Day visits and throughout the rest of the year, the Irish Government has consistently conveyed to the US Administration and Congressional leaders the priority which Ireland attaches to immigration reform in the United States, while at all times respecting that US immigration policy is a matter solely for the US authorities to formulate and implement.

In encouraging our friends in the US towards immigration reform, we have two key objectives: increased pathways for legal migration by Irish citizens to the US and relief for the plight of undocumented Irish citizens living in the US.

In that regard, the Taoiseach discussed the issue with President Trump in the Oval Office on March 15 last and also in his meetings on Capitol Hill during this year's St. Patrick's Day visit.

In addition to the exchanges over the St. Patrick's Day period, I had previously raised the issue with then-Secretary of State Tillerson when I visited Washington DC last month. The Government's Special Envoy to the United States Congress on the Undocumented, Deputy John Deasy, has also been very active, while our Embassy in Washington DC is engaged with

the Administration and with contacts on Capitol Hill on an ongoing basis.

Through these many high-level contacts and discussions, whether over the St. Patrick's Day period or at other times, the Government has been exploring a number of different options, including the possibility of a reciprocal agreement covering the undocumented Irish in the US, on the one hand, and US citizens looking to move to Ireland, on the other.

However, this remains a very challenging issue and I do not want to raise expectations unduly. Immigration reform has been a divisive issue within the US political system for decades, with pronounced disagreement, even within the same political parties, on the best way to deal with an issue which directly affects over 11 million people.

In that context, finding a solution for the thousands of undocumented Irish in the US remains a difficult task.

That said, I can assure the House that the Government, its Special Envoy and our Embassy in Washington DC are continuing to give top priority to this issue, during the annual St. Patrick's Day visits and throughout the rest of the year, mindful of its importance to the thousands of undocumented and to their families in Ireland, and that we will spare no effort in seeking a solution.

Brexit Issues

82. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the consideration that was given to assisting Ireland in relation to Brexit in the St Patrick's Day ministerial visits; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14548/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): St. Patrick's Day provides Ireland with an unparalleled opportunity to promote our political and economic interests abroad, as well as access to key political and business contacts in leading markets around world. Recommendations for Ministerial travel over the 2018 St. Patrick's Day period were based on input from our Team Ireland network of diplomatic missions and state agency offices overseas, in addition to consultation with Departments and Agencies at home on where Ministerial visits would have most significant added value in promoting Ireland's interests internationally. The Taoiseach, Government Ministers, Chief Whip and I travelled overseas during this year's St. Patrick's Day period to promote Ireland and Ireland's interests around the globe. The Attorney General, Ceann Comhairle and Cathaoirleach of the Seanad also participated in the 'Promote Ireland' programme of St. Patrick's Day visits. In total, the programme of visits encompassed 38 countries, including 26 cities across the EU.

The majority of the destinations chosen in 2018 were priority markets for Ireland's trade, tourism and investment interests, where a high-level political presence reinforced the year-round promotional efforts of our diplomatic teams and state agencies in market. Ministerial visits to the EU were prioritised in 2018 given the importance of building strategic alliances in the context of Phase II of the Brexit negotiations and, looking forward, a post-Brexit European Union. Three Ministers also travelled to the UK to continue to build on the very important British Irish relationship. Ministerial programmes provided an opportunity to explore market diversification possibilities for Irish companies.

A set of key messages, including extensive material on Brexit, was provided to Ministers and the Embassy network in advance of St. Patrick's Day, to ensure a coordinated and coherent approach to our overseas engagement.

In addition to Brexit, this year's St. Patrick's Day programme provided a platform for Ministers to deliver key messages on Northern Ireland, Ireland's campaign to become a member of the UN Security Council in 2021-22 and the Irish economy.

Brexit Issues

83. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the elements of the December 2017 joint report (details supplied) that relate to trade and regulations with regard to cross-Border trade on the island of Ireland have been fully agreed by Britain to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14559/18]

87. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on whether the United Kingdom maintaining full alignment with those rules of the internal market and the customs union which, now or in the future, support North-South co-operation, the all-island economy and the protection of the Good Friday Agreement must be the default starting point for North-South alignment pending the agreement of other solutions as set out in Article 49 of the December 2017 Brexit agreement. [14709/18]

99. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the recent comments by the British Brexit Secretary of State, Mr. Davis, that the British Government would not agree to the backstop option as proposed which is contrary to the recent agreement reached at the European Council; if he has raised this matter with the European Commission and or Mr. Davis since those comments were made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14765/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 83, 87 and 99 together.

I have clearly communicated Ireland's position and priorities in relation to the draft Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland to the EU Taskforce as well as to my UK counterparts in recent weeks. I met with Michel Barnier immediately on 26 February and again on 19 March, following the recent round of intensive negotiations with the UK. Recent engagement with British Ministers has included the Minister for the Cabinet Office, David Lidington, the Secretary of State for Exiting the EU, David Davis, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Philip Hammond, the Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Karen Bradley.

I welcome the progress made on the draft Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland during the most recent round of EU-UK negotiations, which concluded on 19 March. This is recorded in an annotated, colour-coded version of the draft Withdrawal Agreement published by the Commission Taskforce on 19 March, which reflects agreement on some articles of the draft text, including the *Common Travel Area* and *Other Areas of North South cooperation*.

During the negotiations, the UK also accepted that a legally operative version of the 'backstop' for the border will be included in the Withdrawal Agreement, in line with paragraph 49 of the Joint Progress Report agreed last December, and that all the issues identified in the draft Protocol reflect those that must be addressed. These were important steps forward.

The European Council, in agreeing additional negotiating Guidelines on 23 March, stressed that work remains to be done in order to achieve overall agreement on the draft Withdrawal Agreement, especially with regard to the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland. It reiterated that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. To this end, an intensive schedule of negotiations has been agreed between the EU and the UK with a view to continuing efforts to narrow

the remaining gaps on the draft Protocol and its annexes, including with regard to Article 4, which addresses the free movement of goods between Northern Ireland and the EU. The overall aim is to maintain full alignment with those rules of the Single Market and Customs Union that are necessary to protect North South cooperation and the all-island economy as well as to avoid a hard border. It will be necessary for all the EU rules involved to be listed exhaustively in annexes to the Protocol and that work is continuing.

The first rounds took place earlier this week and more will be held over the coming weeks. Irish officials will be involved in some of these meetings where the Taskforce believes that this would be helpful, and we will of course remain in close contact with it.

Departmental Staff Training

84. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the amount that his Department has spent on social media training and consultancy in each year since 2016. [14569/18]

85. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if training has been delivered in his Department on the use of social media (details supplied); the frequency and cost of this training; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14585/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 84 and 85 together.

The Training needs of my Department are identified as part of the annual goal setting phase of the Performance Management Development System (PMDS). They are then analysed and necessary training is provided in a number of areas including social media. In-house expertise is used wherever possible and training on the use of social media is generally delivered by the Communications Unit in my Department at no additional cost.

The information requested by the Deputy regarding training that has been delivered on the use of social media including the amount spent on social media training and consultancy since 2016 is set out in the table. However, from time to time the Department's 80 missions overseas may incur modest miscellaneous expenses in relation to social media training.

Date	Description	Organised by	Cost
19 January 2016	Facebook training for missions	DFAT Communications Unit with Facebook	NIL
21 January 2016	Twitter training for missions	DFAT Communications Unit with Twitter	NIL
12 May 2017	Twitter Training for NGOs	Twitter	NIL
6 June 2017	Social Media training	DFAT Communications Unit with Twitter	NIL
21 June 2017	Social Media training	DFAT Communications Unit with Twitter	NIL
03 August 2017	Pre-posting Training	DFAT Communications Unit	NIL
23 August 2017	Social Media Training	DFAT Communications Unit	NIL

Date	Description	Organised by	Cost
10 November 2017	Twitter Training for NGOs and Government	Twitter	NIL
19 January 2018	“Building and Sharing Content on Social Media”	DFAT Communications Unit	NIL

Consultancy Contracts

86. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the value of contracts for services awarded to a company (details supplied) by his Department since 2010, in tabular form; and the type of work undertaken by the company. [14630/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): No contracts have been awarded by my Department to the company referred to by the Deputy.

Question No. 87 answered with Question No. 83.

Ministerial Responsibilities

88. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his role with responsibility for Brexit. [14710/18]

100. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of contingency planning under way within his Department and State agencies for the impact of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14934/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 88 and 100 together.

Co-ordination of the whole-of-Government response to Brexit is being taken forward through the cross-Departmental coordination structures chaired by my Department.

Contingency planning for a no-deal or worst-case outcome, bringing together the detailed work being undertaken by individual Ministers and their Departments on issues within their policy remit, is now well advanced. Its focus is on the immediate regulatory and operational challenges which would result from such an outcome. It assumes a trading relationship based on the default WTO rules, but also examines the possible effects on many other areas of concern. This work is therefore providing baseline scenarios for the impact of Brexit across all sectors, which can then be adapted as appropriate in light of developments in the EU-UK negotiations, including in regard to transition arrangements and the future relationship. It also takes account of the planning being undertaken at EU level by the new Commission Preparedness Unit, which is issuing information notes aimed at different business sectors.

The Government is already acting in order to get Ireland Brexit ready. Dedicated measures were announced in Budget 2018, including a new €300m Brexit Loan Scheme for Business and a €25m Brexit Response Loan Scheme for the agri-food sector as well as additional supports for capital investment in the food industry and Bord Bia marketing and promotion activities, amounting to over €50m in total. Additional capital expenditure allocation of €4.3bn over four years will also allow the State and its agencies to properly plan major infrastructure projects while ensuring that communities and businesses can plan ahead. There was also increased funding provided to my Department for the opening of six new diplomatic missions as part of

Global Footprint 2025, which will contribute to helping our exporters find new markets. Our Government's enterprise agencies continue to work with companies, helping them to deal with Brexit – making them more competitive, diversifying market exposure, and up-skilling teams.

Longer-term economic strategies will also be critically important in addressing the challenges of Brexit, notably Ireland 2040 –the National Development Plan. The Enterprise Strategy 2025 is also under review and we are in active discussions with the European Investment Bank on a potential increase in investment in the country.

Before the summer the Government will finalise a paper, building on that published in May 2017, on our approach to the negotiations and our latest assessment of the economic and sectoral challenges posed by Brexit and our responses to them.

Overseas Development Aid

89. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the estimated cost of reaching the 0.7% ODA/GNP target from its current base of approximately 0.3%, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14714/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): The Government is strongly committed to Ireland's overseas development cooperation programme and to its place at the heart of our foreign policy. For 2018, the Government has allocated just over €707 million for ODA, the third consecutive year ODA has increased. Based on current estimates, it is anticipated this level of allocation will see ODA amount to approximately 0.3% of GNI in 2018.

The current Programme for Government sets out our ambition to meet the UN target of providing 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI) in Official Development Assistance (ODA), as resources permit. The intention is to reach the target by 2030, the timeframe for UN Sustainable Development Goals. Progress towards the 0.7% target will need to be made in a sustainable and manageable way, building on Ireland's recognised role as a reliable and effective partner in combatting global poverty and hunger, and in providing humanitarian assistance. In order to prepare that managed progression towards the UN target, a new White Paper on Irish overseas development assistance will be produced this year. Reaching the 0.7% target will involve significant increases to the ODA budget. Where these increases might be best focused and how they can be managed prudentially and effectively will require careful planning and consultation, including with other Government Departments and stakeholders more generally. The White Paper process will give direction in this regard, as will the recent report by the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Defence on Irish Aid.

The following table sets out a sample stepped scenario for meeting the UN target of spending 0.7% of GNI on ODA by 2030, with interim targets of 0.4% in 2022, 0.5% in 2026 and 0.6% in 2028.

Year	Total ODA - In € millions	ODA as a % of Projected GNP
2018	707.10	0.30%
2020	906.37	0.35%
2022	1,109.29	0.40%
2024	1,323.96	0.45%
2026	1,560.65	0.50%

Year	Total ODA - In € millions	ODA as a % of Projected GNP
2028	1,986.83	0.60%
2030	2,459.13	0.70%

As GNI is calculated in arrears, forecasts for Gross National Product (GNP) are used as a proxy for GNI in the above calculations.

Emigrant Support Services

90. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the expenditure on the emigrant support programme; the estimated full year cost of increasing expenditure by 5%, 10%, 15% and 20%, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14715/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The budget for the Emigrant Support Programme in 2018 is €11.595 million and is unchanged in recent years. An increase of 5% on the 2018 budget would cost €579,750. An increase of 10% on the 2018 budget would cost €1,159,500. An increase of 15% on the 2018 budget would cost €1,739,250. An increase of 20% on the 2018 budget would cost €2,319,000.

EU Funding

91. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the expenditure on the Trust Fund for Africa; the estimated full year cost of increasing expenditure by 5%, 10%, 15% and 20% respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14716/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): The European Union Emergency Trust Fund for stability and addressing root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa is an element of a comprehensive package of EU initiatives to support stability across the North, East (Horn of Africa) and West (Sahel / Lake Chad) African Regions, contributing to tackling the root causes of instability, forced displacement and irregular migration. This Trust Fund was launched at the EU-Africa Summit on migration in Valletta, Malta, on 11-12 November 2015 and will operate until 2020. Over €3.4 billion has been pledged for the Trust Fund by the EU and EU Member States.

At the time of its launch, Ireland made a commitment to provide a bilateral contribution of €3 million over the period covered by the Trust Fund, 2016 to 2020 (€600,000 per annum). This commitment is earmarked for the Horn of Africa region.

At the meeting of the European Council of 19-20 October 2017, and in response to a call by President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, for further pledges to meet pressing needs, the Taoiseach pledged additional bilateral Irish funding of €3 million by 2020, doubling Ireland's total commitment to the Trust Fund.

To date, Ireland has provided €600,000 to the Trust Fund in 2016, and a total of €1 million in 2017. The scheduled €1 million payment for 2018 is currently being processed, with the remaining balance of €3.4 million to be disbursed over 2019 and 2020.

Ireland also makes an assessed contribution, along with other EU Member States, to the Eu-

European Development Fund (EDF) which in turn supports the Trust Fund (€2.29 billion pledged by EDF).

Incremental increases of the type set out in the Deputy's question are not planned. However, the effect of such increases would be as set out in the following table:

Current Commitment	Total additional cost to 2020 if commitment increased by:			
	5%	10%	15%	20%
€6,000,000	€300,000	€600,000	€900,000	€1,200,000

Diplomatic Representation Expenditure

92. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the full year cost of running an embassy; the full year cost of running a consulate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14717/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): As I indicated in my reply to the same question from the Deputy on 16 January, the work of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's embassy and consulate network around the world continues to be important to Ireland's economic development and the enhancement of our international reputation. The total network, of currently some 73 embassies and consulates and 7 multilateral missions, promotes Ireland's political, economic and cultural interests and values, provides services to our citizens, develops strategic stakeholder relationships and represents Ireland in international organisations.

The Embassies' and Consulates work in support of Ireland's interests includes:

Supporting Irish businesses to grow overseas, by promoting our wider trade interests including through EU and WTO regulation, facilitating business visas, underpinning the work of our State agencies and supporting Ministerial visits and trade missions;

Supporting and deepening trade and investment relationships around the world: by raising Ireland's visibility in markets, proactively addressing market access issues, hosting high-level events in support of Irish business, brokering introductions and offering guidance on local markets and business culture;

Providing frontline consular and passport services to Irish citizens overseas, and

Influencing and negotiating for Ireland on issues that could impact our interests and priorities.

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

The cost of operating an embassy or consulate can vary significantly depending on its location, the type and range of services provided and the overall size of the embassy/consulate. The larger embassies/consulates would cost in the region of €1m to €5m per annum to operate. Smaller single diplomatic officer embassies/consulates would cost in the region of €0.5m per annum to operate.

Passport Services

93. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of staff employed in the passport offices and in the passport online service; the cost of running the passport service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14718/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): 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”) for appointment to the Passport Offices in Dublin and Cork this year. All sections in the Passport Service are monitored closely to ensure they are sufficiently resourced to meet demand. The number of Passport Service staff working on the online passport application service varies depending on the volume of applications in the system. The Deputy should be aware however, that in addition to the team processing these applications, staff assigned to other duties, such as those in the Communications Unit, deal with queries arising in connection with all passport applications, including queries from online passport applicants. The cost of running the Passport Service in 2017 was €33.7 million. This figure excludes accommodation costs as any properties occupied by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in the State are rented and maintained by the Office of Public Works. The figure includes the Passport Reform Programme which is delivering major upgrades to the passport service technology platforms and business processes as well as significant customer service improvements.

Peace and Reconciliation Programme

94. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the expenditure on the Peace and Reconciliation Fund; the estimated full year cost of increasing expenditure by 5%, 10%, 15% and 20%, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14719/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Reconciliation Fund, which is administered by my Department, was established in 1982 to support civil society organisations in creating better understanding between the people and traditions of the island of Ireland, and also between Ireland and Britain. Over €48 million has been allocated to over 2,000 projects during this time. As part of the 2014 Stormont House Agreement, the Government committed to the continued allocation of €2.7 million annually to the Reconciliation Fund. If funding were increased by the percentages indicated by the Deputy, the allocation would amount to:

Per Cent	Amount
Plus 5 per cent	€2.835 million
Plus 10 per cent	€2.97 million
Plus 15 per cent	€3.105 million
Plus 20 per cent	€3.24 million

Any significant increases in funding would also need to take account of the level of staffing resources required to ensure the continued effective operation of the Reconciliation Fund.

More information on the Reconciliation Fund and details of the application process are available on the Department’s website:

Syrian Conflict

95. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the efforts being made to promote an ending to the ongoing conflict in Syria on a bilateral and multilateral level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14757/18]

96. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the steps he has taken on a bilateral basis to express the Government's opposition directly to the Russian and Iranian embassies in Dublin to their ongoing involvement in atrocities in Ghouta and elsewhere in Syria. [14758/18]

97. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the steps that will be taken by the Government to address the refugee crisis in Syria; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14759/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 95, 96 and 97 together.

The situation in Syria continues to be one 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 which has cost the lives of hundreds of civilians, underscores the extent to which an end to the violence is urgently needed in order to relieve the suffering of the Syrian people.

UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura is leading political negotiations to end the conflict based on the 2012 Geneva Communique and UN Security Council resolution 2254. Ireland and the EU fully support this process. 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 on 24 February. This resolution calls for an immediate ceasefire and unhindered humanitarian access. The international community must redouble efforts to press for the immediate and full implementation of the ceasefire, and unimpeded humanitarian access to populations in need.

It is quite clear that Russia's support for the Assad regime has prolonged the suffering of the Syrian people. Russia has also repeatedly vetoed UN Security Council resolutions on Syria, which has seriously undermined the protection of Syrian civilians.

Ireland's has communicated its concerns directly to the Russian and Iranian authorities on numerous occasions. In October 2017, I relayed Ireland's strong views directly to Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Titov. I also called on Russia to ensure civilians are protected, and to exert its influence on other parties to the conflict to do the same. My Department's officials and I will continue to raise our concerns about the ongoing crisis in Syria with the Russian and Iranian authorities in our interactions with them.

Since 2012, Ireland has contributed over €95 million to the humanitarian response to the Syria crisis, including €25 million in 2017 alone. 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 will host another donors' conference for Syria in April of this year at which Ireland will announce its pledge to the humanitarian effort in response to the Syria crisis in 2018.

Ireland and the EU are providing significant assistance to refugees and refugee hosting communities. The EU is supporting the Turkey Refugee Facility in response to the almost 3 million refugees being hosted in that country, and €3 billion has been committed to this by the EU between 2016 and 2019, with Ireland contributing €22.9 million. €15 million of this has already been provided to date.

In addition, Ireland also supporting refugee hosting communities in Lebanon and Jordan. Ireland has already contributed €9.67 million in direct humanitarian assistance to Lebanon channelled through UN and NGO partners, and €5.89 million to Jordan through the Jordan Humanitarian Fund.

Under the terms of the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP), administered by the Department of Justice, Ireland has also committed to accept up to 4,000 refugees from the region. To date, almost 2,000 people have already arrived.

Northern Ireland

98. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to resume talks between the Irish and British Governments and the political parties in Northern Ireland in relation to the need to have the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive restored; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14762/18]

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. We are considering all possible options in this regard. I spoke 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, both 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. 99 answered with Question No. 83.

Question No. 100 answered with Question No. 88.

Electric Vehicles

101. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost of extending the VRT rebate for electric vehicles from 2021 to 2026. [14878/18]

102. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost of extending the VRT rebate for hybrid vehicles from 2021 to 2026. [14879/18]

122. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost of extending the VRT rebate for electric vehicle purchase from 2021 to 2025. [14893/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 101, 102 and 122 together.

I am advised by Revenue that the cost of the Vehicle Registration Tax (VRT) rebate for electric cars in 2017 is estimated at €5.3 million. There is no basis available to Revenue on which to forecast possible future costs as this is linked to the growth in the volume of electric car sales. The higher the rate of growth in the sales of electric vehicles the higher the annual costs to the taxpayer of extending the relief.

I am advised by Revenue that the cost of the VRT rebate for hybrid cars in 2017 is estimated at €10.3 million for the year. There is no basis available to Revenue on which to forecast possible future costs as this is linked to the growth in the volume of hybrid car sales. The higher the rate of growth in the sales of hybrid vehicles the higher the annual costs to the taxpayer of extending the relief.

Small and Medium Enterprises Supports

103. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Finance his views on a proposal by an organisation (details supplied). [14916/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): This Government recognises that small businesses play a central role in the sustainable recovery of the Irish economy. To facilitate this, Government policy since 2011 has been focused on ensuring that all viable SMEs have access to an appropriate supply of credit facilities from a diverse range of bank and non-bank sources.

However, the Deputy will be aware that in my role as Minister for Finance I have no direct function in the relationship between the banks and their customers. I have no statutory function in relation to the banking decisions made by individual lending institutions at any particular time and these are taken by the board and management of the relevant institution. This includes decisions in relation to products and lending as determined by the banks.

Ireland does not currently have a bespoke national regulatory regime or framework for the regulation of crowdfunding, including peer-to-peer lending, unlike some other European member states, including the UK.

Given that crowdfunding is not currently a regulated activity in Ireland, there are no formal consumer protections available for those using crowdfunding platforms to provide funds. The Central Bank of Ireland has issued an information notice alerting consumers to this fact.

The crowdfunding market in Ireland is relatively small. There are currently only three crowdfunding platforms operating in the market, all of which provide peer-to-peer lending services. There are no equity crowdfunding platforms operating in Ireland currently. Currently, crowdfunding constitutes approximately 0.33% - 0.4% of the SME finance market; for comparison, this is 12% in the UK.

My Department conducted a six-week public consultation process on the regulation of crowdfunding that ended in June 2017. There was general support from the Irish crowdfunding industry and stakeholders for the regulation of crowdfunding in Ireland and it was felt that regulation would be beneficial to both industry and consumers. The main concern was that regulation might be overly burdensome or onerous and stifle or hinder the development of the industry.

The Deputy may be interested to know that the European Commission published a draft Regulation on a European regulatory regime for crowdfunding platforms earlier this month. This decision to consider regulating crowdfunding on a harmonised, European level has been prompted by the European Commission's ongoing monitoring of the crowdfunding market and industry. This proposed pan-European regulatory regime allows for the possibility of Irish crowdfunding platforms to passport their services to other European member states. My Department will be working with the Commission and other member states on this proposed Regulation in the coming months.

Departmental Staff Training

104. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Finance the amount that his Department has spent on social media training and consultancy in each year since 2016. [14568/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I wish to advise the Deputy that during 2016 the following expenditure was incurred by the Department in relation to the following training;

- Certificate for Press Officer - €1,560.
- MA in Political Communication €3,600.

Departmental Staff Training

105. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Finance if training has been delivered in his Department on the use of social media (details supplied); the frequency and cost of this training; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14584/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I wish to advise the Deputy that during 2016 the following expenditure was incurred by the Department in relation to the following training;

- Certificate for Press Officer - €1,560.
- MA in Political Communication €3,600.

Departmental Contracts Data

106. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Finance the value of contracts for services awarded to a company (details supplied) by his Department since 2010, in tabular form; and the type of work undertaken by the company. [14629/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): During 2017, the Department engaged through the Office of Government Procurement Framework Process, the services of the company (details supplied). The company undertook work under the Civil Service Dignity at Work policy.

The Company was paid a total of €12,888.19 for their services.

Help-To-Buy Scheme Data

107. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the median and mean tax rebate issued to first-time buyers under the help to buy scheme in 2017; the cost of the scheme in 2017; and the number of purchasers that availed of the scheme on a national, Dublin and ex-Dublin basis in tabular form. [14764/18]

113. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number and value of help to buy applications that were originally granted but were subsequently found to not qualify for the grant; the number and value of cases in which the borrowers did not qualify at the time of the purchase of the property; the number and value of cases in which the borrowers did not qualify due to the breaking of the terms of the help to buy scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14826/18]

114. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number and value of successful help to buy applications since its inception; the average grant by region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14827/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 107, 113 and 114 together.

The Help to Buy (HTB) incentive was introduced in Finance Act 2016, backdated to 19 July 2016. The online HTB system was made available by revenue in January 2017 and I am assured by Revenue that there are no issues with the system and that it is robust and working correctly.

I am advised by Revenue that there were 5,392 HTB claims in 2017, of which 4,824 have been approved, with a combined total cost to the Exchequer of €68.9m. The median and mean tax rebate for HTB claims approved in 2017 is €14,750 and €14,277 respectively. From inception of the scheme to end February 2018, there have been 6,005 claims, of which 5,529 have been approved, with a combined total cost of €79.4m.

The following table sets out 2017 claims on a national, Dublin and ex-Dublin basis:

Area	Amount
National	5,392
Dublin	2,052
Ex-Dublin	3,340

I am further advised by Revenue that HTB statistics for 2017 are available on their website

(<https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/tax-expenditures/htb/htb-yearly.aspx>).

These statistics show the number of HTB applications that have reached the claim stage in 2017 broken down by geographical area. The average value of approved claims (to end February 2018) by county is given in the following table.

County	Average Value of Approved HTB Claims
Carlow	€10,988
Cavan	€10,808
Clare	€11,601
Cork	€14,536
Donegal	€9,973
Dublin	€15,941
Galway	€12,812
Kerry	€13,084
Kildare	€15,206
Kilkenny	€13,831
Laois	€10,415
Leitrim	€11,587
Limerick	€11,694
Longford	€12,406
Louth	€11,848
Mayo	€12,977
Meath	€13,783
Monaghan	€10,424
Offaly	€10,958
Roscommon	€12,909
Sligo	€12,071
Tipperary	€11,877
Waterford	€10,512
Westmeath	€11,983
Wexford	€11,087
Wicklow	€14,947

In relation to ineligible claims, I am advised by Revenue that it is not possible to provide information on these at the time of the purchase of the property or due to breaking the terms of the incentive. The HTB incentive operates on a self-assessment basis and the claim is also verified by the qualifying contractor. Eligibility of retrospective claims is reliant on meeting the criteria in respect of a contract executed in the relevant period. The online system rejects claims unless the details provided by the claimant are in accordance with the relevant eligibility criteria. In line with Revenue's normal risk-based approach, targeted checks are carried out to confirm

the eligibility of claims. Where it is clear that despite the details input by the claimant, the eligibility criteria were not in fact met, Revenue will, in accordance with the legislation, seek to recover the amounts claimed incorrectly and apply interest and penalties, where appropriate.

I am also advised by Revenue that, to date, only a very small number of follow-up compliance letters have issued to claimants and where documentary evidence is provided that confirms eligibility for the scheme, this allows for the matter to be resolved to Revenue's satisfaction.

Tax Yield

108. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Finance if he will report on the additional tax take by the State gained through changes to the taxation of section 110 companies introduced in 2016 and 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14775/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Finance Act 2016 made certain changes to the taxation of qualifying companies, within the meaning of section 110 Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 ("TCA 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.

A further amendment was made in Finance Act 2017 which came into force in respect of interest accrued on or after 19 October 2017.

There are a number of factors that make it hard, at this point, to judge the full impact of those amendments:

- Payments: The timing of payments of tax by companies is complex and makes it difficult to judge the impact of the amendments in the early years.

- Returns: For companies with a 31 December year end, as most section 110 companies do, their corporation tax returns (Form CT1) for 2016 were filed on 23 September 2017.

However, those returns will only show 4 months of profits impacted by the 2016 Finance Act. In addition the Finance Act 2017 amendments will impact approximately 3 months of profits for the 2017 year end. Therefore the full impact of both the 2016 and 2017 Finance Act amendments will not be visible until the taxable profit details are filed for the year ending 2018 on 23 September 2019.

- Deterrent: As the amendments were anti-avoidance in nature, they are designed to have a deterrent effect. The success of such measures is the reduction in the activity taking place rather than an increase in tax raised.

That said outlined below are the payment received from section 110 companies during 2015, 2016 and 2017. Please note these figures are provisional and subject to change.

Year	€'m
2015	65
2016	199
2017	128

The above year represents the year in which the payment was received, and not the year to which the payment relates.

Revenue advise me that while the CT1 for accounting periods ending in 2016 have been filed in 2017 (with the data currently being processed and analysed), returns for 2017 tax year

for most companies will be due for filing by 23 September 2018. These 2017 returns require certain information from qualifying companies in respect of their Irish property businesses. When the qualifying companies file those returns, Revenue will be in a position to quantify the Irish property base of qualifying companies. Allowing for late returns and processing of data, data from returns filed in September 2018 will be available for analysis in early 2019.

Tax Yield

109. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Finance if his Department is investigating whether additional changes are required for the taxation of section 110 companies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14776/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Section 110 is intended to create a tax neutral regime for bona-fide securitisation and structured finance purposes. 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.

Mortgage Interest Relief Data

110. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of cases in which mortgage interest relief has been underpaid and in which the mortgage holder is liable for unpaid tax in each of the years 2013 to 2017 and to date in 2018; the value of taxes unpaid in each of the years; the number and value of cases in which the lenders were licensed credit institutions, retail credit firms and unregulated loan owners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14823/18]

111. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the responsibility of the borrower in the event that mortgage interest relief is miscalculated and that tax is left unpaid; the potential repercussions for such lenders; the role of the Central Bank in the calculation of mortgage interest relief; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14824/18]

112. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the regulatory position with regard to the calculation of mortgage interest relief if that calculation is undertaken by the unregulated loan owner and not the credit servicing firm; if the Central Bank has power in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14825/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 110

to 112, inclusive, together.

I assume that the Deputy's questions refer to instances where the lender may have miscalculated and overpaid relief to the mortgage holder and subsequently seeks to recoup the overpayment at a later date.

I am advised by Revenue that section 244 Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 provides for tax relief on qualifying interest paid in respect of qualifying home loans. The applicable ceilings and rates will depend on the particular circumstances of the borrower, and are set out in section 244. Comprehensive guidance notes on mortgage interest relief can be found on the Revenue website using the following link

<https://www.revenue.ie/en/tax-professionals/tdm/income-tax-capital-gains-tax-corporation-tax/part-08/index.aspx>

Section 244A TCA 1997 provides that tax relief is granted at source by the lender in respect of loans secured by a mortgage on a borrower's principal private residence. To facilitate this process the lender is required to seek, on periodic basis, updated information from Revenue, which the lender (or their appointed service provider) uses to calculate the correct amount of tax relief due in respect of each qualifying loan.

The lender (or their appointed service provider) then submits a claim to Revenue in relation to the tax relief granted at source by them on all qualifying loans. Before making any payment to the lender Revenue carries out the required verification checks to ensure the payment to the lender represents the correct amount of tax relief due on each qualifying loan. If the lender incorrectly grants too much tax relief at source to a qualifying loan, Revenue will not reimburse the lender for any excess incorrectly granted. Any consequential adjustment to an individual borrower's liability is a matter for the lender and borrower. As a result many lenders do not show these excess payments to borrowers on their returns to Revenue but instead deal directly with the borrower in relation to them.

On this basis, Revenue does not have a complete record of such overpayments, as they are not overpayments on the Revenue system. Therefore accurate information on the numbers or amounts of such overpayments for the years 2013 to 2017, and to date in 2018, cannot be provided from Revenue data.

The Central Bank has no role in the calculation of mortgage interest relief but has an overall supervisory role over the regulated lenders and service providers.

Questions Nos. 113 and 114 answered with Question No. 107.

Knowledge Development Box

115. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of companies availing of the knowledge development box; the cost of the programme in 2016; the number of SMEs that obtained the relief in 2016; the cost of these claims; the number of SMEs that were expected to claim the relief; the number of SMEs that claimed the relief; the cost of these claims; the number of SMEs that were expected to claim the relief; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14829/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Knowledge Development Box (KDB) applies for accounting periods commencing on or after 1 January 2016. The claimant company has a period of up to 24 months to make a claim for KDB relief.

I am informed by Revenue that a small number of companies (less than 10) with accounting periods ended on or before 31 December 2016 have claimed KDB relief. The tax cost of these claims to-date is in the region of €5 million. Due to taxpayer confidentiality, Revenue cannot comment on the size or nature of the claimant companies to date.

Given the large amount of documentation that is necessary, it is anticipated that more companies will make use of the 24 month time frame available. As such, more claims in respect of the year ended 31 December 2016 may be made by September 2018.

NAMA Operations

116. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the status of the planned wind-up of NAMA; the details of the remaining portfolio; the estimated timeframe in this regard; the estimated financial outturn from the wind up of NAMA; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14830/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I wish to advise the Deputy that there has been no change to NAMA's expectation that it will complete the majority of its work by end-2020.

The Deputy will be aware that NAMA reached a major milestone in October 2017 when it announced that it had redeemed all of its State-guaranteed Senior Bonds of €30.2bn, three years ahead of schedule.

I am advised that NAMA has also made substantial progress on a number of its other objectives, including its social housing programme which has seen the delivery of over 2,400 homes for use as social housing.

While much has been achieved, there remains a significant body of work to be carried out by NAMA over the coming years. This includes completion of its Dublin Docklands SDZ programme on which there has been major progress since NAMA launched this initiative in September 2014. NAMA estimates that over 4m sq. ft. of Grade A office space and over 2,000 apartments will be delivered on its Docklands SDZ sites. I am advised that all of the sites have proceeded through the planning process or are in the planning process and that construction has commenced on 2.5m sq. ft. of commercial space and some 600 apartments.

NAMA has also made progress on another of its objectives which is to facilitate or fund the delivery of 20,000 residential units by the end of 2020. To date, I am advised that NAMA has funded the delivery of 7,400 houses, with another 3,500 houses currently under construction. Planning approval has been obtained for an additional 7,500 homes.

NAMA's work includes the deleveraging of the remainder of its loan portfolio. The carrying value of the portfolio as at 30 September 2017, net of cumulative impairment, was €3.7 billion. I am advised that this residual loan portfolio will require intensive case management and asset management if the projected terminal surplus is to be realised. As such I do not envisage setting a shorter timeframe which could have the effect of reducing the projected terminal surplus, which is currently estimated at €3 billion, assuming market conditions remaining favourable.

Brexit Data

117. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the expected impact Brexit will have on Ireland's annual contribution to the EU budget; and if he will make a statement on

the matter. [14831/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Brexit negotiations are currently ongoing. Therefore, as the Deputy will appreciate, it would not be appropriate for me to discuss those negotiations or the potential impact on Ireland's net contribution to the EU Budget in detail at this point.

Ireland welcomes that the UK has agreed to honour its share of the financing of all the obligations while it was a member of the Union, in relation to the EU budget (and in particular the Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020), which will enable a positive future relationship between the EU and the UK.

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. In this regard, a key element will be the European Commission's proposal on the next MFF which is due to be published in early May.

EU Budgets

118. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the gross contribution Ireland has made to the European Union budget in each of the years 2010 to 2016, respectively; the contribution in 2017; the net benefit or contribution made in each year in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14832/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): EU budget payments and public sector receipt data are published annually by the Department of Finance in the Budget Statistics publication. The public sector receipt measure captures funds under 'shared management' between national and EU authorities. In addition, the EU also pays some additional receipts directly to private beneficiaries under 'centralised direct management', most notably under the EU research funding programme.

Ireland's receipts from and contributions to the EU budget for the years 2010 to 2016 are set out in the table below:

Year	Public Sector Receipts - €m	Direct Management Receipts* - €m	Total Receipts - €m	Payments to EU budget - €m	Net Receipts - €m
2010	1885.3	80.4	1965.7	1352.4	613.3
2011	1950.2	80.2	2030.4	1349.7	680.7
2012	1837.7	108.8	1946.5	1393.2	553.3
2013	1672.9	113.0	1785.9	1726.2	59.7
2014	1419.7	83.9	1503.6	1685.5	-181.9
2015	1783.4	147.7	1931.1	1952.1	-21.0
2016	1622.1	156.0	1778.1	2022.8	-244.7

* - Direct Management - funds which are awarded and spent directly by the Commission. These are primarily research receipts.

Ireland's contribution to the EU budget in 2017 is estimated to be c. €2,020 million. In relation to receipts for 2017, a final outturn will be published as part of the 2018 Budget Statistics report.

Central Bank of Ireland Enforcement Actions

119. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the fines imposed by the Central Bank on financial institutions in each of the years 2013 to 2017 and to date in 2018; if the institution was a licensed credit institution, retail credit firm, credit servicing firm and other types of financial institution in each case in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14833/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am informed by the Central Bank that since 2006, 117 cases have been concluded through the Administrative Sanctions Procedure (ASP)/settlement procedure. This has resulted in the sum of €61,608,525 being imposed by way of monetary sanctions.

Public statements on the Central Bank's settled ASP cases are available publicly on the Central Bank's website.

Attached is a table in response to the specific question from the Deputy detailing settled ASP cases involving the types of entities and timespan specified.

Year	Credit Institutions		Retail Credit Firms		Credit Servicing Firms		Other	
	Fines	Amount	Fines	Amount	Fines	Amount	Fines	Amount
2018	0	€0	0	€0	0	€0	0	€0
2017	2	€5,425,000	0	€0	0	€0	9	€1,814,970
2016	2	€4,725,000	1	€4,500,000	0	€0	6	€2,850,750
2015	1	€5,000,000	0	€0	0	€0	6	€2,333,040
2014	3	€4,465,000	0	€0			8	€957,450
2013	2	€1,040,000	0	€0			14	€5,308,215

Please note Credit Servicing firms were not regulated before 2015 and became regulated via the Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing Firms) Act 2015.

Tax Data

120. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the gross amount of corporation tax paid in 2017 by the top ten multinational groups as measured by corporation tax paid; the proportion this represents of overall corporation tax paid in 2017; the gross amount paid by the top 20 multinational groups in 2017; the proportion this represents; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14834/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the gross amount of Corporation Tax paid by the ten largest multinational groups (in Corporation Tax payment terms) was €3,436 million in 2017. This represented 37 per cent of the total gross Corporation Tax payments that year. The gross amount of Corporation Tax paid by the top 20 multinational groups was €4,207 million in 2017. This represented 45 per cent of the total gross Corporation Tax payments that year. These figures are provisional figures.

I am also advised that Revenue will publish a detailed analysis of the most recently available Corporation Tax data in April.

NAMA Loan Book Value

121. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the book value and estimated market value of the loan assets held by NAMA by geographic area, for example, Ireland, the UK and so on; if a decision has been made to accelerate the disposal of NAMA's assets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14835/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The most recent details on NAMA's remaining portfolio are available in the Agency's quarterly section 55 accounts for Q3 of 2017 which are laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas and which are publically available on the NAMA website. The latest accounts for Q3 2017 outline that the carrying value of the Agency's remaining loan portfolio, as at 30 September 2017, net of cumulative impairment, was €3.7 billion.

In relation to the geographic breakdown of NAMA's remaining portfolio, I am advised that, as of 30 June 2017, 85% of the assets securing NAMA's loan portfolio were located in Ireland, 10% were located in the UK, 4% was located in the rest of the world and the remaining 1% related to non-real estate assets. I am advised that this information will be updated by reference to 31 December 2017 when NAMA's 2017 Annual Report is published in June 2018.

The Deputy will be aware that as Minister for Finance, I have no role in respect of NAMA's commercial operations. I am advised that NAMA expects to complete the majority of its work by end-2020 and that its residual loan portfolio will require intensive case management and asset management if the projected terminal surplus is to be realised. As such I do not envisage setting a shorter timeframe which could have the effect of reducing the projected terminal surplus, which is currently estimated at €3 billion, assuming market conditions remaining favourable.

Question No. 122 answered with Question No. 101.

VAT Rate Reductions

123. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Finance his views on a proposal by an organisation (details supplied). [14917/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): EU VAT law provides that supplies of goods and services outside the EU are zero-rated for VAT purposes. For exporting businesses this means they would be in a permanent repayment position when it comes to any VAT paid on their business inputs. To minimise the administrative burden and cash-flow loss for exporting business, EU and Irish VAT law allows for supplies made to exporting companies to be made free of VAT.

Section 56 of the VAT Consolidation Act 2010 provides that persons who supply goods and services to exporting businesses can zero rate those supplies provided the exporting business provides the suppliers with a copy of an authorisation issued by the Revenue Commissioners. A business can only qualify for this authorisation where they export 75% or more of their supplies.

Section 56 is designed to assist businesses that are engaged primarily in exporting. Reducing the qualifying threshold to 50% of turnover would represent a significant policy change

in that it would bring businesses with 50% of their supplies in the domestic market within the scope of the scheme, affecting the competitiveness of other domestic operators who would not qualify. Reducing the export threshold to 50% would also greatly expand the volume of zero-rated invoices issued for domestic supplies of goods and services. This would involve an increased risk of abuse and necessitate increased controls and checks by Revenue. For these reasons I have no plans to change the Section 56 export threshold level.

Flood Relief Schemes

124. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if his Department is liaising with Westmeath County Council with a view to putting in place an appropriate flood relief scheme for Mullingar, County Westmeath, with a view to ensuring that adequate protection is put in place for Mullingar and its environs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14679/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The core strategy for addressing areas at potentially significant risk from flooding is the Office of Public Works (OPW) Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme. The Programme, which is being undertaken by engineering consultants on behalf of the OPW working in partnership with the local authorities, involves the production of predictive flood mapping, the development of preliminary flood risk management options and the production of Flood Risk Management Plans.

The Plans are one of the outputs from the CFRAM Programme that is being delivered by the OPW in partnership with all local authorities, including Westmeath County Council.

Mullingar was studied as part of the Shannon (CFRAM) Programme. The proposed measure outlined in the Flood Risk Management Plan for Mullingar is to provide ongoing maintenance to the existing Mullingar Flood Relief Scheme which was completed in 2010.

In Summer 2017, the OPW finalised and submitted the Plans to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform for an independent review of the environmental assessments. Having received the outcomes of the independent, the Commissioners of Public Works have submitted the Flood Risk Management Plans to the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform for approval.

Flood Relief Schemes Status

125. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of works under consideration for flood defence in County Wicklow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14770/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The core strategy for addressing areas at potentially significant risk from flooding is the Office of Public Works (OPW) Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme. The Programme involves the production of predictive flood mapping for each location, the development of preliminary flood risk management options and the production of Flood Risk Management Plans.

The following areas in Co Wicklow were assessed under the CFRAM Programme: Arklow, Ashford, Rathnew, Aughrim, Avoca, Baltinglass, Blessington, Greystones, Kilcoole, Newcastle

and Wicklow town.

In Summer 2017, all Plans were submitted to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (D/PER) for an independent review of the environmental assessments. The Commissioners of Public Works have now submitted the Flood Risk Management Plans to the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform for approval.

Arklow Flood Relief Scheme

Wicklow County Council is leading the assessment and development of a viable, cost effective and sustainable Flood Relief Scheme for the Avoca River, Arklow. A Feasibility Report has identified an economically viable scheme for the town. A Public Information Day on the emerging preferred scheme was held in November 2016. Work has been progressing on the development of the proposed scheme and it is hoped to submit the proposed scheme to An Bord Pleanála for planning permission by Quarter 3, 2018, with possible construction works to commence by end of 2019. Funding will be provided by the OPW.

Minor Works

There are currently no applications on hand under the Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme for County Wicklow.

Flood Relief Schemes

126. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the maintenance of the River Shannon; his plans to allow for additional river maintenance works to be carried out in March and April 2018 to help alleviate the damaging effects of flooding for farmers in the river's catchment area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14530/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Shannon Flood Risk State Agency Co-ordination Working Group was established in early 2016 by the Government across all of the State Agencies involved with the River Shannon. The Group is building on the existing work and commitment of all the State Agencies involved in flood risk and continues to enhance the ongoing co-ordination and co-operation between members.

During 2017, targeted maintenance works were carried out at Madden's Island, downstream of Banagher, to improve the conveyance capacity and navigation of the Shannon. Further works were due to be carried out last month however this was not possible due to the high water level on the channel. This work will be carried out later this year during the next cutting season.

Following the receipt of consent in September 2017 from the National Parks and Wildlife Service of the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, targeted works have been planned for a number of other locations for the appropriate seasonal windows. To date, work has been carried out at Muckinish and Shannon Grove (Kilnaborris), in accordance with the consent provided. Further work at these and other locations for which consent applies will be planned in terms of the seasonal restrictions that may apply to the types of activity required at each site. Accordingly it is not possible to undertake additional river maintenance works in March and April.

Departmental Staff Training

127. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the amount that his Department has spent on social media training and consultancy in each year since 2016. [14573/18]

128. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if training has been delivered in his Department on the use of social media (details supplied); the frequency and cost of this training; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14589/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 127 and 128 together.

In response to the Deputy's questions, training has been delivered in my department on the use of social media. The details of this training and cost are detailed in the list below.

2016 - No Spend

2017

Name	Course	Cost
Certificate for Civil Service Press Officers	12 days	€1,560.00
Certificate in Social Media	6 days	€1,890.00
-	Total:	€3,450.0

2018 - No Spend

Departmental Contracts Data

129. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the value of contracts for services awarded to a company (details supplied) by his Department since 2010, in tabular form; and the type of work undertaken by the company. [14634/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In 2015, my Department revised the Dignity at Work policy. In conjunction with this, a framework of external investigators was put in place following a procurement process organised by the Office of Government Procurement. Acrux Consulting Ltd. were awarded a place on this Framework on 27 March 2015. This placement allows for Framework membership and is not a contract.

Separately, the Office of Government Procurement has, since 2010, paid €10,317.91 to Acrux for training as set out below.

Training	Cost
Civil Service Dignity at Work Policy	€1,260.18
Civil Service Dignity at Work Policy	€8,716.61
Team Training Workshop	€341.12
Overall total	€10,317.91

Community Employment Schemes Supervisors

130. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will report on discussions which have taken place to date at the community sector high level forum in regard to the need for community employment scheme supervisors to be provided with

a pension scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14686/18]

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

Departmental Correspondence

131. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if his attention has been drawn to correspondence to a person (details supplied) in County Clare; his policy in respect of issuing letters such as this; if there is a lower limit amount of pension overpayment which the PSSC will not attempt to recoup from bereaved persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14781/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): While this case was processed by the Payroll Shared Services Centre of the National Shared Services Office, it was drawn to my attention after some details were reported in the national media.

In principle, amounts overpaid from the Exchequer must be recouped. The decision on whether a letter should issue in an individual case is an operational one for the NSSO.

With regard to the issue of a specific threshold and in the light of the case mentioned, my officials have sought proposals from the NSSO and, once received, I will ensure they are given full consideration.

Project Ireland 2040

132. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the date on which it was decided to publish the capital plan and the National Development Plan 2018-2027 in the same document; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14892/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I presume the Deputy is referring to the National Development Plan (NDP) and the National Planning Framework (NPF) which, following a special Cabinet meeting at the Institute of Technology in Sligo, were launched as Project Ireland 2040 on 16 February 2018. The Government decided on 6 September 2017 that the NDP would be published in conjunction with the NPF.

Public Sector Staff

133. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the cost of rolling out the Civil Service mobility scheme to date. [14908/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In response to the Deputy's question, the following table outlines the cost (inclusive of VAT) of rolling out the civil service mobility scheme to date, including development of Mobility portal, Mobility interactive map and in-service communications.

Mobility Portal	Cost.
Pilot of Phase 1 of CS Mobility Scheme - March 2017	€69,819.72
Phase 1A of CS Mobility Scheme - launched November 2017	€120,810.60

Mobility Portal	Cost.
Total	€190,630.32
Supporting Communications	
In-house communications (including video and posters)	€3,720.75
Development of interactive map	€3,936.00
Total	€7,656.75

Psychological Assessments

134. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the lack of availability of educational psychologists to assess the special needs of children in south west County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8924/18]

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

In common with many other psychological services and best international practice, NEPS has adopted a consultative model of service. The focus is on empowering teachers to intervene effectively with pupils whose needs range from mild to severe and transient to enduring. Psychologists use a problem solving and solution oriented consultative approach to maximize positive outcomes for these pupils. NEPS encourages schools to use a continuum based assessment and intervention process whereby each school takes responsibility for initial assessment, educational planning and remedial intervention for pupils with learning, emotional or behavioural difficulties. Teachers may consult their NEPS psychologist should they need to at this stage in the process. Only in the event of a failure to make reasonable progress, in spite of the school's best efforts in consultation with NEPS, will the psychologist become involved with an individual child for intensive intervention or assessment.

This system allows psychologists to give early attention to urgent cases and also to help many more children indirectly than could be seen individually. It also ensures that children are not referred unnecessarily for psychological intervention.

I have made enquiries in relation to the matter raised by the Deputy and can inform him that there is one Educational Psychologist post currently vacant and that arrangements are in hand in relation to their replacement.

I would advise that if there are concerns in relation to the educational or social and emotional development of any student these should be raised by the parents, in the first instance, with the Principal of the school he/she is attending, with a view to the Principal discussing the situation with the assigned NEPS psychologist or local NEPS service.

Schools Facilities

135. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a feasibility study will be considered to include his Department and educational patrons regarding the use of school premises for afterschool care throughout the State; and if he will make a statement on

the matter. [8825/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Guidelines on the use of School Buildings outside of School Hours were published in October 2017; these can be viewed on my Department's website. The purpose of these guidelines is to provide guidance for schools in relation to the use of school buildings outside of school hours. These guidelines are provided for schools who currently make their buildings available and also for those schools who are considering putting such arrangements in place.

The publication of these guidelines followed a consultation process with relevant school patrons.

School Enrolments

136. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a school (details supplied) has been instructed not to enrol new students other than in junior infants. [14516/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that the school referred to applied to my Department in March 2017 seeking additional accommodation in respect of projected increases in enrolment.

Having assessed the application my Department was satisfied that there was sufficient capacity to meet the demand for school places in the catchment area within which the school referred to is located. This may sometimes, however, lead to pupils not being offered a place in their school of first preference. This position was advised to the school authorities concerned.

I would like to bring to the Deputy's attention the significant funding my Department has approved in recent years to improve the accommodation at the school referred to. In 2013, under the Prefab Replacement Scheme, six mainstream classrooms and a special education room were provided and, more recently, a project was approved by my Department for six mainstream classrooms and a two class special needs unit; this project is currently ongoing.

School Transport

137. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding school busses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14520/18]

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

Currently over 116,000 children, including almost 12,000 children with special educational needs, are being transported in over 4,500 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually at a total cost of almost €190 million in 2017.

The safety of children travelling on the school transport service is of paramount importance to my Department and to Bus Éireann, which operates the school transport scheme.

Bus Éireann has advised that every school bus is required to be tested under the Road Safety

Authority's (RSA) Commercial Vehicle Roadworthiness Test (CVRT), which is the primary annual vehicle safety inspection.

It is a matter for Bus Éireann to procure contractors to provide services for school transport purposes. Bus Éireann is obliged to tender all works, goods and services in line with the European Directives on public procurement, which includes school transport services performed by contractors under the School Transport Scheme.

In order to comply with Contractual agreements, Contractors are obliged to nominate buses less than twenty years old. Bus Éireann has withdrawn a number of buses older than 1997 from its School Transport fleet over the last twelve months. One bus older than 1997 had been retained as a replacement vehicle on a short term basis, however this has now subsequently been withdrawn from service.

National Training Fund

138. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the value of the national training fund for each of the past ten years; the allocations that have been made from this fund since 2016, in tabular form; the process by which these allocation were decided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14522/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): The National Training Fund Act, 2000 provides for a levy on employers to be used to give skills or to raise skills amongst those in, or seeking, employment.

Funding from the National Training Fund (NTF) is allocated by my Department with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, in accordance with the provisions of the National Training Fund Act, 2000.

Section 7 of the National Training Fund Act, 2000 provides that payments may be made from the Fund in respect of schemes, which are established to:

- (a) raise the skills of those in employment;
- (b) provide training to those who wish to acquire skills to take up employment; or
- (c) provide information in relation to existing, or likely future, requirements for skills in the economy.

While the NTF does not form part of the Vote of my Department, the allocation for each scheme is determined as part of the annual Estimates process. The NTF is included as an annex to the published Estimates and such funding is included in the overall expenditure ceiling for my Department since 2011.

The operation of the EU Fiscal Rules and the inclusion of the NTF in my Department's overall annual expenditure ceiling mean that, in the absence of an increased rate of contribution, additional expenditure cannot be sourced from the NTF without a corresponding drop in Exchequer expenditure.

Following a consultation process, the Government, as part of Budget 2018, decided to raise the rate of the National Training Fund (NTF) levy by 0.1% in 2018 to 0.8% and by a further 0.1% in both 2019 and 2020. This measure allows for additional expenditure of €47.5 million from the NTF in 2018 under the EU fiscal rules.

This increase in the NTF levy takes account of the benefit to employers of having access to skilled graduates across further education and training and higher education to meet their identified skills needs as well as being able to access training for their current employees.

The increase is being accompanied by a programme of reforms in how the NTF is managed, evaluated and reported on. The key reforms include:

- A Comprehensive Review of the NTF
- Additional and refocused expenditure on programmes relevant to employers
- An NTF more aligned with employer needs
- A greater say for employers, more transparency and stronger evaluation:
 - A new strategic dialogue model, incorporating strategic performance agreements clearly aligning local/regional and national targets, will be put in place in the Further Education and Training sector from 2018.

There has already been a need to change and rebalance the suite of funded programmes to reflect the changing labour market conditions and areas of skills needs. The 2018 NTF allocations represent a shift in the focus of expenditure from the Fund. Programmes are focused on labour market skill needs across higher education, further education and training and other partners.

The following tables outline NTF levy receipts for the period 2008 to 2017 and the allocation of NTF Funding 2016 to 2018.

National Training Fund National Training Fund Levy Receipts (€m)

2008 - 2017

2008	413
2009	372
2010	309
2011	316
2012	299
2013	317
2014	338
2015	364
2016	390
2017 Provisional	431

National Training Fund

Allocation of Funding 2016 – 2018

-	2016	2017	2018
Total Expenditure	361,994,000	366,050,000	415,400,000
Training In Employment	82,486,000	106,530,000	153,980,000
SOLAS apprenticeship allocation	59,665,000	77,400,000	90,000,000
HEA apprenticeship allocation	435,000	3,000,000	32,000,000
Skillnets training networks programme - In Employment	12,636,000	16,380,000	19,530,000

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-	2016	2017	2018
Enterprise Ireland Training grants to industry	3,500,000	3,500,000	3,500,000
SOLAS Workplace Education Fund / Skills for Work	2,800,000	2,800,000	3,000,000
IDA Training grants to industry	3,000,000	3,000,000	3,000,000
SOLAS Traineeship	-	-	1,500,000
Regional Skills Innovation	-	-	1,000,000
Community and Voluntary Organisations (The Wheel)	375,000	375,000	375,000
Institute of Engineers Ireland --- CPD Pilot Project	75,000	75,000	75,000
Training For Employment	278,648,000	258,660,000	259,560,000
SOLAS training for Employment	232,266,000	220,702,000	182,502,000
Labour Market Focused HE Provision	-	-	37,000,000
Springboard +	27,818,000	27,438,000	30,438,000
DSP - Community Employment	4,200,000	4,200,000	4,200,000
DSP - Technical Employment Support Grants	3,200,000	3,200,000	3,200,000
Skillsnets training networks programme - for Employment	3,564,000	1,820,000	2,170,000
European Globalisation Fund	500,000	300,000	50,000
SOLAS Labour Market Education & Training / Momentum	7,100,000	1,000,000	-
Provision for Information on Skills	860,000	860,000	1,860,000
Regional Skills Fora	-	-	1,000,000
SOLAS Skills Analysis Unit	370,000	480,000	480,000
Provision of Information on Skills Requirements - EGFSN	490,000	380,000	380,000

Further Education and Training Programmes

139. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the workforce development framework report; his plans to publish the report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14523/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): A commitment has been made in the 2018 Action Plan for Education to publish a policy framework for the Further Education and Training (FET) sector on Employee Development. Work is progressing on development of the framework and is on schedule for publication in Quarter 3 with implementation scheduled to commence in quarter 4 of this year.

Departmental Staff Training

140. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount that his Department has spent on social media training and consultancy in each year since 2016. [14566/18]

141. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if training has been delivered in his Department on the use of social media (details supplied); the frequency and cost of this training; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14582/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 140 and 141 together.

My Department has not arranged specific training in relation to the social media forums mentioned by the Deputy. However, my Department did arrange media skills training for a small number of officials in 2016 and 2017. The following tabular statement gives details of the companies and the expenditure concerned.

Expenditure on media skills training in 2016 and 2017 for officials at the Department of Education & Skills. The course content includes writing press releases, understanding how print media, radio and television programmes operate.

COMPANY	COURSE	YEAR	COST
Public Affairs Ireland	Certificate for Civil Service Press Officers	2016	€1,890.00
Carr Communications	Media Skills Training	2016	€430.00
Carr Communications	Media Skills Training	2017	€460.00

Consultancy Contracts

142. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the value of contracts for services awarded to a company (details supplied) by his Department since 2010, in tabular form; and the type of work undertaken by the company. [14627/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I should like to advise the Deputy that the Department's financial management system (FMS) has no records of any payments made to Acrux consultants since 2010.

DEIS Status

143. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the criteria for the removal of DEIS status for a school (details supplied); the guidelines under which this was decided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14637/18]

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

A detailed document explaining the methodology used in the new Identification process is available on my Department's website at www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools/DEIS-Identification-Process.pdf.

The school referred to by the Deputy was assessed as part of the overall assessment of all schools using this new identification process in early 2017 and was deemed not to have a concentrated level of disadvantage within its student cohort such as to warrant support under the DEIS Programme.

The school in question is a new school established in September 2015 following the amalgamation of 2 schools, one DEIS and one non-DEIS. Accordingly, as with all schools in this

situation prior to the current school year, it will receive additional funding in respect of the pupil cohort of the former DEIS school until the end of the 2022/2023 school year.

Schools included in DEIS with effect from September 2017 are those whose level of disadvantage has been identified as those schools serving the highest concentrations of disadvantage among their pupil cohort. Schools which have not been included at this stage are those which have not been identified as having the highest levels of concentrated disadvantage amongst their pupil cohort, under the new identification model. This is the first step in a process and the fact that a school has not been included now does not preclude its inclusion at a later date, should assessment indicate a level of disadvantage that warrants additional supports.

An update of the identification model is currently underway in my Department. This will take account of updated school data as provided by schools for the current school year combined with the Pobal HP Index of Deprivation, based on Small Area Population statistics derived from the 2016 National Census. It is envisaged that this process will be completed shortly.

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

Teachers' Remuneration

144. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of pay scales of teachers or resource staff members in Youthreach, adult education or PLC colleges; and if there is a national common scale. [14638/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In December 2017, my Department published circulars setting out revised salary rates to be implemented with effect from 1 January 2018. These revised salary rates were introduced as a result of the Public Service Stability agreement 2013 - 2020 (Haddington Road Agreement/Lansdowne Road Agreement) and the Public Service Pay and pensions Act 2017.

Circulars 0076/2017 and 0083/2017 include the pay scales for the staff members referred to by the Deputy. These circulars can be accessed on my Department's website via the following links:

https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0076_2017.pdf.

https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0083_2017.pdf.

Teaching Qualifications

145. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a person with a master's degree and a higher diploma in further education is considered to be a teacher. [14639/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Teaching Council is the independent regulatory body with statutory authority for the professional regulation of teachers in this State.

Registration with the Council is necessary in order to be recognised as a teacher for employ-

ment in a state funded teaching post. Registration ensures that standards of entry to the profession are maintained. Teachers may apply for registration in the following sectors:

Route 1: Primary

Route 2: Post-primary

Route 3: Further Education

Route 4: Other

The registration of teachers is governed by Section 31 of the Teaching Council Acts 2001-2015 and the Council registers teachers under the Teaching Council [Registration] Regulations 2016 and The Teaching Council [Registration] (Amendment) Regulations 2016. My Department is not directly involved in in teacher registration.

Applicants wishing to register as a teacher in the Further Education sector must meet the requirements for registration under Route 3, as set out in the regulations, which are available on the Teaching Council's website at www.teachingcouncil.ie/en/Registration/How-do-I-register/.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

146. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps being taken to provide early intervention classes on the southside of Cork city and in surrounding suburbs such as Douglas, Rochestown, Carrigaline, Passage West and Crosshaven; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14641/18]

147. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps being taken to improve the number of autistic spectrum disorders, ASD, appropriate primary school places in Cork city and county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14642/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 146 and 147 together.

My Department provides for a range of placement options and supports for schools, which have enrolled students with special educational needs, including those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), in order to ensure that wherever a child is enrolled, s/he will have access to an appropriate education.

ASD Early intervention classes are available for children aged 3-5 with a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Early intervention classes are intended to provide early support for children with ASD before they start school. Following early intervention children will attend a mainstream class unless there is professional guidance that they require a special class or a placement in a special school.

Most children with ASD attend mainstream class, but some require the environment of a special class or special school. This decision is based on a professional assessment in consultation with the NCSE.

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

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

In Cork City and County there are 23 Early Intervention ASD classes, 102 Primary ASD classes and 50 Post-Primary ASD classes in mainstream schools for 2017/18 school year.

The NCSE has advised my Department that it intends to establish 4 new Early Intervention ASD classes, 10 new Primary ASD classes and 5 new Post-Primary ASD classes in the city and county for the 2018/19 school year.

The NCSE has advised my Department that there is an emerging need for additional Special School placement options in the Cork area. 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 school placements can access such placements. This process is ongoing.

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 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 as early as possible. Where Parents have been unsuccessful in enrolling their child in a special school or special class placement for the 2018/19 school year, they should update their local SENO to inform the planning process. Contact details are available on www.ncse.ie.

The NCSE has advised that they continue to work with schools, parents, NEPS, health professionals and other staff who are involved in the provision of services in the Cork area for children with special educational needs, to ensure that each child has a school placement appropriate to their needs for the 2018/19 school year.

The Deputy should be aware that the Department of Children and Youth Affairs provides supports for pre-school education.

The principal vehicle for the delivery of pre-school education is the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme which provides for early learning in a formal setting to children before they commence primary school.

Children with disabilities have access to pre-school services under the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) programme of supports.

AIM is a child-centred model, involving seven levels of progressive support, moving from the universal to the targeted, depending on the needs of the child and the pre-school.

Details of the supports which are available under AIM can be found at www.preschoolaccess.ie which contains comprehensive information on the access and inclusion model and on how to apply for the new schemes and supports.

Summer Works Scheme Eligibility

148. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the decision to refuse funding via the summer works scheme for a school (details supplied) will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14644/18]

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.

School Accommodation Provision

149. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which he expects in the course of the school building programme to replace all prefab accommodation at primary and second level within the targeted timescale; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14647/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, it is my intention, in accordance with the Programme for Government to replace all purchased temporary accommodation with permanent accommodation, where the need is established, over the lifetime of my Department's Capital Programme (2016-2021). An assessment of the number of prefabs being used in schools to deliver the curriculum will also determine whether individual prefabs need to be replaced in the context of the long-term accommodation needs of each individual school. When completed, this assessment will quantify the number of prefabs to be replaced.

It is intended that this assessment, when finalised, will enable the replacement of such prefabs to commence in 2019. A funding provision of €180 million is being made available from 2019 onwards for this initiative in the programme.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

150. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which adequate special needs places exist in mainstream education at primary and second level nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14648/18]

157. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which the number of SNAs in situ is adequate to meet the demand; his plans to augment the situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14655/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 150 and 157 together.

Ensuring that children with special educational needs are supported and given the opportunity to reach their full potential is a key priority for this government.

My Department's policy aims to ensure that all children with Special Educational Needs can have access to an education appropriate to their needs, preferably in school settings through the

primary and post primary school network.

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

All state-funded primary and post primary schools have been allocated additional resources to provide for children with special educational needs enrolled in school.

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

To this end my Department has allocated SNA support to over 12,000 extra pupils since 2011 and provided extra special educational needs teachers to meet the expansion in children in need of teaching support.

Since 2011, the increase in SNAs has been 3,545, including an additional 2,080 posts in the last two years bringing the current number to some 14,120.

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

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

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), which is a separate statutory agency, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), is responsible for processing applications from schools for special educational needs supports. The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in allocating such support.

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

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

The NCSE are currently finalising a comprehensive review of the SNA scheme which aims to identify and recommend how, in the future, the additional care needs of students, over and above those needs that could be reasonably expected to be managed by teaching staff, should be met and to identify and recommend the most appropriate form of support options to provide better outcomes for students with Special Educational Needs who have additional care needs, having regard to the significant amount of State investment in this area.

Following the interim report on the SNA comprehensive review provided to the Minister in May 2017, the NCSE established an NCSE-led working group, comprising relevant stakeholders, to assist in developing a proposal for an improved model for providing care supports so as to provide better outcomes for students with special educational needs who have additional care needs, the report of which has been finalised.

The report of the cross Departmental Working Group established to develop proposals in relation to the need for nursing supports in schools for children with complex medical needs is being finalised currently.

The full report of the SNA Comprehensive Review, which will be informed by the Report

from the Working Group to consider an alternative model of SNA allocation and the working group on Nursing Supports for students with complex medical needs is due to be submitted to the Minister in Spring 2018 and work is ongoing to meet this deadline.

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

Schools Building Projects Status

151. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status in regard to meeting full requirement in terms of new builds or extensions to existing school buildings nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14649/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department's Capital Programme (2016-2021) continues to address the challenges posed by the significant bulge in pupil enrolments going through our schools. This has seen a significant expansion in the rate of provision of new school places. The Capital Programme details the school projects that are being progressed through the architectural planning process, including those schools in County Kildare.

We are building more schools and providing more additional school places than ever before. This reflects the priority which this Government is putting on Education. We have doubled the number of school places being provided from 8,900 in 2010 to 18,000 in 2017. We have also increased the number of large scale project completions from 25 in 2010 to 50 in 2016 and 46 in 2017. Since 2011, some 340 major school projects and over 120,000 new and replacement places have been provided.

In addition, there are currently a total of 52 large scale projects under construction while a further 11 major projects with approval to advance to tender and construction are expected to commence on site shortly. A further 22 large scale projects are due to commence tendering over the coming months and are expected to start on site during 2018. That represents a total of 85 projects either under construction or progressing to commence construction in 2018. Over 80% of our school capital allocation has to be expended on the delivery of large scale projects and the additional accommodation scheme.

The Department is managing the school building programme in a manner that ensures that school projects in the architectural process are delivered as quickly as possible. There are a number of factors however such as difficulties with acquiring sites and issues arising in the planning process that have impacted on the pace of progress of projects announced. These issues are in the majority of cases outside the Department's control. The Department is in ongoing liaison directly with each of these schools in relation to the ongoing progression of their projects in the architectural and planning process.

My Department is satisfied that the €8.4 billion investment in the National Development Plan (2018-2027) is sufficient to deliver the necessary school infrastructure over the next decade.

School Curriculum

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

to which the school curriculum at primary and second level continues to be adequate to meet the challenges of the workplace in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14650/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The curriculum has to evolve if our schools are to successfully equip young people with the capacity to meet the requirements of a modern, competitive economy.

The Action Plan for Education details clear curriculum change and other commitments that will secure the step-change needed to equip learners with the skills necessary to participate in the modern economy. It includes:

- actions to promote STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) at primary and post-primary levels;
- the introduction of a new Leaving Certificate Computer Science subject from September 2018;
- the development of a new Primary Mathematics Curriculum, which will support all children in the development of algorithmic and computational thinking, which form the basis of coding;
- the implementation of a Digital Strategy in schools to enrich the teaching, learning and assessment environment.

The entire thrust of Junior Cycle reform is to enrich the learning experience of pupils with new curricula, new opportunities for project work, team work, short courses, and the new Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement which can showcase this work. This approach puts a higher value on the competencies which employers seek.

As part of the Framework for Junior Cycle a new Science specification was introduced in September 2016, while the new Mathematics specification will be implemented from September 2018. A short course on coding is also in place.

At Senior Cycle a review of the Leaving Certificate has been commenced by the NCCA. A Primary Level a review of structure and time allocation is under way.

Apprenticeship Programmes

153. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the degree to which the number of apprentices now in apprenticeships is adequate to meet the demand; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14651/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): Apprenticeship is a demand driven educational and training programme, which aims to develop the skills of an apprentice in order to meet the needs of industry and the labour market. Consequently, the number of apprentices being registered is determined by employers within each sector. This Government is committed to supporting the increased registration of apprentices across all sectors. New apprenticeship registrations have risen from 2,698 in 2014 to 4,843 in 2017, which represents an increase of almost 80%.

As the Deputy is aware, we are currently expanding the range of apprenticeships on offer to meet the identified skill needs of industry. Arising from our first call for apprenticeship proposals in 2015 eleven new apprenticeships have been developed in a wide range of sectors,

including financial services, engineering, ICT and accounting. Further new apprenticeships are to be submitted for validation to Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) shortly and, subject to successful validation, are expected to get underway in 2018.

In addition, arising from last year's second call for proposals, we recently announced 26 new programmes for further development into national apprenticeships across a wide variety of sectors including construction, engineering, horticulture and agriculture. These new programmes, once developed, will add to and complement the range of apprenticeships currently on offer in developing the skill needs of our economy.

Departmental Strategies

154. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which the educational system at primary, second, third and fourth level continues to meet the skills challenges of the modern workplace; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14652/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The education and training system at all levels has a number of strategies in place to ensure we meet existing and future skills demands in the workplace. Among those strategies are the National Skills Strategy 2025 and the Action Plan for Education 2016-2019.

The Action Plan for Education 2016 – 2019 provides a key statement on the reform agenda across the education and training system. The Plan contains a range of actions to be implemented with particular focus on disadvantage, skills needs, and continuous improvement within the education service.

The National Skills Strategy 2025 identifies Ireland's current skills profile, provides a strategic vision and specific objectives for Ireland's future skills requirements, and sets out a road map for how the vision and objectives can be achieved across the education and training sector.

With over 140 Actions, the Strategy sets out the Government's commitment to improving and using skills for sustainable economic growth and outlines how we can develop a well-skilled, adaptable workforce.

Included in the actions in the Strategy is the creation of a new National Skills Council. The Council, which was established in April 2017, will oversee research and advise on prioritisation and delivery of identified skills needs. Skills information from the EGFSN, the SLMRU and the Regional Skills Fora will feed into the work of the Council.

In the Higher Education Sector, the primary objective of Springboard+ in 2017 is to provide upskilling and reskilling courses to develop the talent base in Ireland in key growth sectors of the economy including ICT; hospitality; biopharma, medical device technologies and manufacturing; financial services; and entrepreneurship. In 2017 the eligibility criteria was expanded to include homemakers and those in employment who wish to upskill or reskill in specific high demand skills areas i.e. Biopharma/Med-tech.

Departmental Strategies

155. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which he remains satisfied that graduates continue to be adequately equipped for a modern and highly competitive workplace; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14653/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am satisfied that graduates are equipped for a modern workplace and that the education sector will continue to evolve to meet the needs of today's workplace. At higher education level, I am continuing to progress the structural changes outlined under the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030. Under this strategy, legislation allowing for the establishment of Technical Universities was signed into law in March of this year. The creation of technological universities provides the opportunity to drive regional development and provide more opportunities for individuals, enterprise and the community. These institutions will have significant impact and influence regionally, nationally and internationally.

The System Performance Framework 2018-2020 was published in January 2018. This provides an outline, including targets and deliverables, for the delivery of higher education to 2020. One of the key objectives of the framework is to provide a strong talent pipeline which responds effectively to the needs of enterprise, public service and community sectors. Examples of targets under the student enterprise and employability indicator of this objective include the extension of employability statements to all disciplines in all HEIs by 2020 and giving all students the opportunity to undertake a work placement or work-based project as part of their course by 2025.

To help foster stronger links between employers and the education and training sector, my Department has established a network of nine Regional Skills Fora. Each forum provides robust labour market information to inform programme development while encouraging greater collaboration between enterprise and education and training providers to identify and respond to existing and future regional skills needs.

Graduate transfer into the workforce is tracked through the Higher Education Authority (HEA) annual first destinations survey. The most recent survey 'What do Graduates do? The Class of 2016 First Destinations of University Graduates', was published in January 2018. Nine months after graduation, almost 70% of the 18,200 third level graduates surveyed from the class of 2016 were in employment. This was up from 68% the previous year and continues the increasing trend of the last 5 years. The proportion of graduates going overseas to gain employment was down – the first significant decline in 3 years. Entry salaries are rising and there is an added salary premium for those graduating with a postgraduate qualification.

The Higher Education Outcomes Research Report, published in February, 2018 was a result of combining HEA graduate records of approximately 70,000 graduates with CSO administrative data. The report considered graduates from Irish HEIs from 2010 to 2014 and explored variations of graduate outcomes after 1, 3 and 5 years in terms of employment and workforce participation levels. 66% of the 2010 graduates were in substantial employment in the first year after graduation. This proportion increased to 76% for 2014 graduates.

Teachers' Remuneration

156. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which the two tier pay system for teachers continues to be an irritant in the educational sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14654/18]

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

later points in the scale.

As a result of these changes, the current starting salary of a new teacher is €35,958 and from 1 October 2020 onwards will be €37,692.

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

Differential pay scales were introduced by the then Government in 2010. It must be borne in mind that the pay reduction for post-2011 entrants applied to all public servants and not just teachers, and that any restoration of these measures in respect of teachers would be expected to be applied elsewhere across the public service.

In accordance with the Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform recently laid before the Oireachtas a report on the matter of the pay of new entrants to the public service. The report assesses the cost of a further change which would provide a two scale point adjustment to new entrants recruited since 2011. The total cost of such an adjustment across the public sector is of the order of €200 million, of which Education accounts for €83 million. The report also acknowledges that during the financial crisis there were policy changes which affected remuneration in different occupations across the public sector (including education). Addressing any issues arising from changes which are not specifically detailed in the report would give rise to additional costs over and above the foregoing figures.

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

The Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform's report will inform discussion on remaining salary scale issues with the parties to the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 in accordance with the commitment in the Agreement to consider the issue of newly qualified pay. That process commenced with a first meeting on 12 October 2017. The three teacher unions attended that first meeting.

Question No. 157 answered with Question No. 150.

Bullying in Schools

158. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which school bullying continues to be an issue; if he is satisfied regarding the adequacy of the provisions in place to combat the problem; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14656/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Action Plan on Bullying, which was published in January 2013, sets out my Department's approach to tackling bullying and promoting an anti-bullying culture in schools. It recommended actions that focus on support for schools, teacher training, research and awareness raising and aim to ensure that all forms of bullying are addressed. Implementation of the actions is ongoing and good progress has been made across all areas of the plan.

As part of the implementation of the Action Plan my Department published new anti-bullying procedures for all primary and post primary schools at the beginning of the 2013/14 school

year.

The procedures are designed to give direction and guidance to school authorities and school personnel in preventing and tackling school-based bullying behaviour amongst its pupils. They include specific requirements in relation to the use of prevention and education strategies and the consistent investigation, follow up and recording of bullying behaviour.

The procedures for schools include important oversight arrangements that involve the school principal reporting regularly to the Board of Management and a requirement for the Board to undertake an annual review of the school's anti-bullying policy and its implementation. Confirmation that the annual review has been completed must be provided to the Parents' Association and published on the school website.

While there is no requirement on schools to report incidents of bullying behaviour to my Department, in the course of their whole school inspection work, my Department's Inspectorate gathers information about how schools deal with bullying in a number of ways through:

- Review of relevant school documentation, including the school's Code of Behaviour and Anti-Bullying policy;
- Meetings with parents and student representatives at which there is an opportunity for parents and students to raise issues where relevant and
- The inclusion of parent and student Questionnaires on items relating to bullying.

Students and parents are also asked to respond to questions about how the school deals with bullying and discipline in the school and whether or not the school provides a safe environment for children.

Where responses indicate that students and/or parent do not believe that bullying is dealt with effectively, Inspectors raise this issue with school management who have ultimate responsibility for Anti-Bullying policies and procedures.

The publication of the new procedures for schools represented the conclusion of just one of the twelve actions set out in the Action Plan on Bullying which was published in January 2013. Other actions that have been progressed include:

- A new national anti-bullying website, www.tacklebullying.ie, was launched in November 2015. The website provides a single point of information and support for young people, parents and teachers affected by bullying.
- My Department supports anti-bullying initiatives aimed at young people such as, the Stand Up! Against Homophobic and Transphobic bullying campaign, organised by BeLonG To, the National Youth Service for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender young people in Ireland and the Europe-wide initiative, Safer Internet Day.
- Since 2013 new resources to tackle cyberbullying "UP2US", "My Selfie and the wider world" and "Lockers" were launched through the internet safety initiative, Web wise and an UP2US social media roadshow was run in collaboration with Beat 102-103.

As outlined in the "Action Plan for Education 2016-2019", my Department is committed to continuing implementation of the Anti-Bullying Action Plan through continued support for the development of anti-bullying training materials and awareness-raising initiatives.

159. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which class sizes remain an issue, with particular reference to achieving class sizes on a par with those applicable throughout the rest of Europe; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14657/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Statistics Section of my Department's website contains extensive data relating to class sizes at primary level. The most recent published information relates to the 2016/2017 school year. Statistics in relation to the current school year will be published in 2018 when the data has been compiled.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Third Level Costs

160. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the degree to which higher education costs have increased over the past number of years; the extent to which the proportion of the national budget under that heading has varied in the past ten years; if continued access to third level for all students seeking to avail of third level education will be ensured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14658/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Higher education is a central part of our plan as a Government to support a strong economy and deliver a fair society.

I have prioritised investment in higher education in the past two budgets, as part of a broader contribution to developing a long-term sustainable funding model for the sector.

As a result, my Department is investing €100m more in higher education in 2018 compared to 2016. Separate to this is the provision which I have made for pay restoration costs in 2018. We will seek to build on this progress in Budget 2019.

I have provided details of my Department's allocation to Higher Education funding in the table attached. These figures include current funding and student grant assistance allocations for the past 5 years.

Promoting access to higher education for under-represented groups continues to be a priority for me. The National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-19 contains more than 30 actions that are intended to make higher education more representative of wider society. This includes initiatives to encourage entrants from socio-economic groups that have low participation in higher education; first time mature student entrants and students with disabilities.

Funding Allocated to Higher Education

2014*	2015	2016	2017	2018
€1,389,484,000	€1,307,939,015	€1,390,202,016	€1,452,596,017	€1,471,331,018

2014* includes Research Funding Allocation which is reported differently from 2015 onwards

Schools Building Projects

161. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which the primary and second level school building requirements are being met in Maynooth, County Kildare, with particular reference to the ongoing building programme; the extra requirements at both levels pending; the schedule for provision of such extra facilities as already agreed or in the course of preparation in conjunction with local management, the Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board or other bodies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14659/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department's Capital Programme (2016/2021) continues to address the challenges posed by the significant bulge in pupil enrolments going through out schools. This has seen a significant expansion in the rate of provision of new school places. The Capital Programme details the school projects that are being progressed through the architectural planning process, including those schools in County Kildare. The Capital Programme also provides for devolved funding for additional classrooms, if required, for schools where an immediate enrolment need has been identified or where an additional teacher has been appointed.

The Deputy will be aware that building projects for 2 new post-primary school buildings in Maynooth are included on my Department's 6-year Construction Programme. The projects went on site in May 2017 and are due for completion in May 2019. This will enable the schools for which the buildings are being provided to start the 2019/20 school year in their new school accommodation.

The Deputy will also be aware that building projects for two primary schools in Maynooth are included on the 6-year Construction Programme. In the case of Maynooth Educate Together National School, tenders were invited on 9th March 2018 and the project is expected to go on site in quarter 3 of this year.

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

The Stage 2B report has been received by my Department, the review is complete, with some minor issues to be addressed by the Design Team. My Department has recently written to the school with regard to a timeframe for progression to tender.

Schools Building Projects

162. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which the primary and second level school building requirements are being met in Leixlip, County Kildare, with particular reference to the ongoing building programme; the extra requirements at both levels pending; the schedule for provision of such extra facilities as already agreed or in the course of preparation in conjunction with local management, the Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board or other bodies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14660/18]

164. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which the primary and second level school building requirements are being met in Sallins, County Kildare, with particular reference to the ongoing building programme; the extra requirements at both levels pending; the schedule for provision of such extra facilities as already agreed or in the course of preparation in conjunction with local management, the Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board or other bodies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14662/18]

169. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which the primary and second level school building requirements are being met in Broadford, County Kildare, with particular reference to the ongoing building programme; the extra requirements at both levels pending; the schedule for provision of such extra facilities as already agreed or in the course of preparation in conjunction with local management, the Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board or other bodies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14667/18]

170. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which the primary and second level school building requirements are being met in Staplestown, County Kildare, with particular reference to the ongoing building programme; the extra requirements at both levels pending; the schedule for provision of such extra facilities as already agreed or in the course of preparation in conjunction with local management, the Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board or other bodies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14668/18]

171. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which the primary and second level school building requirements are being met in Timahoe, County Kildare, with particular reference to the ongoing building programme; the extra requirements at both levels pending; the schedule for provision of such extra facilities as already agreed or in the course of preparation in conjunction with local management, the Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board or other bodies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14669/18]

174. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which the primary and second level school building requirements are being met in Johnstownbridge, County Kildare, with particular reference to the ongoing building programme; the extra requirements at both levels pending; the schedule for provision of such extra facilities as already agreed or in the course of preparation in conjunction with local management, the Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board or other bodies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14672/18]

175. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which the primary and second level school building requirements are being met in Carbury, County Kildare, with particular reference to the ongoing building programme; the extra re-

quirements at both levels pending; the schedule for provision of such extra facilities as already agreed or in the course of preparation in conjunction with local management, the Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board or other bodies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14673/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 162, 164, 169 to 171, inclusive, 174 and 175 together.

My Department's Capital Programme (2016-2021) continues to address the challenges posed by the significant bulge in pupil enrolments going through our schools. This has seen a significant expansion in the rate of provision of new school places. The Capital Programme details the school projects that are being progressed through the architectural planning process, including those schools in County Kildare.

In order to plan for school provision, the demographic data for the school planning areas nationwide, is being kept under ongoing review by my Department to take account of updated child benefit data and updated enrolment data.

My Department is currently undertaking demographic exercises, involving all school planning areas at primary and post-primary level which will determine where additional school accommodation will be needed in the future. It is anticipated that decisions based on the review will be announced in the coming weeks.

Schools Building Projects

163. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which the primary and second level school building requirements are being met in Celbridge, County Kildare, with particular reference to the ongoing building programme; the extra requirements at both levels pending; the schedule for provision of such extra facilities as already agreed or in the course of preparation in conjunction with local management, the Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board or other bodies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14661/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department's Capital Programme (2016-2021) continues to address the challenges posed by the significant bulge in pupil enrolments going through our schools. This has seen a significant expansion in the rate of provision of new school places. The Capital Programme details the school projects that are being progressed through the architectural planning process, including those schools in County Kildare.

In order to plan for school provision, the demographic data for the school planning areas nationwide, is being kept under ongoing review by my Department to take account of updated child benefit data and updated enrolment data.

My Department is currently undertaking demographic exercises, involving all school planning areas at primary and post-primary level which will determine where additional school accommodation will be needed in the future. It is anticipated that decisions based on the review will be announced in the coming weeks.

Projects in respect of three schools in Celbridge are being progressed under my Department's 6 Year Construction Programme.

Question No. 164 answered with Question No. 162.

Schools Building Projects

165. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which the primary and second level school building requirements are being met in Naas, County Kildare, with particular reference to the ongoing building programme; the extra requirements at both levels pending; the schedule for provision of such extra facilities as already agreed or in the course of preparation in conjunction with local management, the Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board or other bodies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14663/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department's Capital Programme (2016-2021) continues to address the challenges posed by the significant bulge in pupil enrolments going through our schools. This has seen a significant expansion in the rate of provision of new school places. The Capital Programme details the school projects that are being progressed through the architectural planning process, including those schools in County Kildare.

The delivery of the new permanent school building for the post-primary school at Naas will cater for 1,000 pupils and the project has been devolved to the Wicklow/Kildare Education and Training Board for delivery.

The ETB is currently in the process of the pre-qualification of contractors stage, the approval for which was given recently by my Department.

A contractor pre-qualification process normally takes in the region of 8 weeks provided no clarifications are sought by potential bidders. A Report on the outcome must be submitted to my Department. Once the Report is reviewed, and assuming that there are no issues with it, approval will be given for the project to proceed to tender.

Schools Building Projects

166. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which the primary and second level school building requirements are being met in Clane, County Kildare, with particular reference to the ongoing building programme; the extra requirements at both levels pending; the schedule for provision of such extra facilities as already agreed or in the course of preparation in conjunction with local management, the Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board or other bodies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14664/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department's Capital Programme (2016-2021) continues to address the challenges posed by the significant bulge in pupil enrolments going through our schools. This has seen a significant expansion in the rate of provision of new school places. The Capital Programme details the school projects that are being progressed through the architectural planning process, including those schools in County Kildare.

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

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

with regard to the further progression of the project at that time.

Schools Building Projects

167. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which the primary and second level school building requirements are being met in Kilcock, County Kildare, with particular reference to the ongoing building programme; the extra requirements at both levels pending; the schedule for provision of such extra facilities as already agreed or in the course of preparation in conjunction with local management, the Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board or other bodies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14665/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department's Capital Programme (2016-2021) continues to address the challenges posed by the significant bulge in pupil enrolments going through our schools. This has seen a significant expansion in the rate of provision of new school places. The Capital Programme details the school projects that are being progressed through the architectural planning process, including those schools in County Kildare.

A building project for a primary school in Kilcock is at an advanced stage of architectural planning Stage 2b (Detailed Design), which includes the application for statutory approvals and the preparation of tender documents. All statutory approvals have been secured.

The Stage 2b submission has been reviewed by the Department and the Board of Management has recently been advised of a timeframe for the further progression of this project.

Schools Building Projects

168. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which the primary and second level school building requirements are being met in Newtown, County Kildare, with particular reference to the ongoing building programme; the extra requirements at both levels pending; the schedule for provision of such extra facilities as already agreed or in the course of preparation in conjunction with local management, the Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board or other bodies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14666/18]

176. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which the primary and second level school building requirements are being met in Tiernohan, County Kildare, with particular reference to the ongoing building programme; the extra requirements at both levels pending; the schedule for provision of such extra facilities as already agreed or in the course of preparation in conjunction with local management, the Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board or other bodies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14674/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 168 and 176 together.

My Department's Capital Programme (2016-2021) continues to address the challenges posed by the significant bulge in pupil enrolments going through our schools. This has seen a significant expansion in the rate of provision of new school places. The Capital Programme details the school projects that are being progressed through the architectural planning process,

including those schools in County Kildare. The Capital Programme also provides for devolved funding for additional classrooms, if required, for schools where an immediate enrolment need has been identified or where an additional teacher has been appointed.

In order to plan for school provision, the demographic data for the school planning areas nationwide, is being kept under ongoing review by my Department to take account of updated child benefit data and updated enrolment data.

My Department is currently undertaking demographic exercises, involving all school planning areas at primary and post-primary level which will determine where additional school accommodation will be needed in the future. It is anticipated that decisions based on the review will be announced in the coming weeks.

Question No. 169 answered with Question No. 162.

Questions Nos. 169 to 171, inclusive, answered with Question No. 162.

Schools Building Projects

172. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which the primary and second level school building requirements are being met in Prosperous, County Kildare, with particular reference to the ongoing building programme; the extra requirements at both levels pending; the schedule for provision of such extra facilities as already agreed or in the course of preparation in conjunction with local management, the Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board or other bodies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14670/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department's Capital Programme (2016-2021) continues to address the challenges posed by the significant bulge in pupil enrolments going through our schools. This has seen a significant expansion in the rate of provision of new school places. The Capital Programme details the school projects that are being progressed through the architectural planning process, including those schools in County Kildare. The Capital Programme also provides for devolved funding for additional classrooms, if required, for schools where an immediate enrolment need has been identified or where an additional teacher has been appointed.

The Deputy will be aware that a building project for a post-primary school in Prosperous 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 schedule of accommodation is currently being devised for the project. 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.

Schools Building Projects

173. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which the primary and second level school building requirements are being met in Rathcoffey, County Kildare, with particular reference to the ongoing building programme; the extra requirements at both levels pending; the schedule for provision of such extra facilities as already agreed or in the course of preparation in conjunction with local management, the Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board or other bodies; and if he will make a statement on the

matter. [14671/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department's Capital Programme (2016-21) continues to address the challenges posed by the significant bulge in pupil enrolments going through our schools. This has seen a significant expansion in the rate of provision of new school places. The Capital Programme details the school projects that are being progressed through the architectural planning process, including those schools in County Kildare. The Capital Programme also provides for devolved funding for additional classrooms, if required, for schools where an immediate enrolment need has been identified or where an additional teacher has been appointed.

As the Deputy will be aware, my Department approved a building project at Rathcoffey National School for the provision of 2 mainstream classrooms. The project was recently approved to proceed to planning permission stage.

Questions Nos. 174 and 175 answered with Question No. 162.

Question No. 176 answered with Question No. 168.

School Accommodation Provision

177. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the application for additional accommodation by a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14704/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department received an application for the provision of additional accommodation at the school referred to in respect of both classroom and ancillary accommodation. 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 for a review of the application from the school and this is currently being considered. My Department will be in further contact with the school on the matter.

Research Funding Applications

178. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason an application (details supplied) which was deemed to fully meet the evaluation criteria and received the panel score "A" was unsuccessful in receiving the necessary funding and was placed on the reserve list for funding. [14713/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Under Innovation 2020, a new competitive fund to support researchers to undertake project-based frontier research, and to develop as Principal Investigators, was established by the Irish Research Council. Following the establishment of the Laureate programme in April 2017, a call was issued for both "Starting" and "Consolidator" grant applications.

There were a total of 258 applications for the programme. All applications were evaluated by an international panel supported by remote peer reviewers, across three panel domains: 1) Humanities and Social Sciences; 2) Life Sciences and 3) Physical Sciences and Engineering. Funding is awarded on the basis solely of excellence, assessed through a rigorous and indepen-

dent international peer-review process.

The process comprised two stages, each with international panel review supported by remote peer reviewers. All three panels were very impressed with the overall quality of proposals proceeding to Stage 2.

The Deputy will understand that this was a competitive process and it was not possible to award funding to all applicants. A total of thirty-six researchers will receive funding; eighteen under the “Starting” Laureate awards and eighteen under the “Consolidator” Laureate Awards. In each of these categories, six awards were made in each of the three panel domains - Humanities and Social Sciences; Life Sciences and Physical Sciences and Engineering.

In addition, the Council will be launching its Call for Advanced Grants under the Laureate programme in the coming weeks.

Schools Building Projects Status

179. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a project (details supplied) will proceed to construction stage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14756/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school to which the Deputy refers is at an advanced stage of the tender process. The school was recently authorised to issue the Letter of Intent to the preferred tenderer. Subject to no issues arising it is anticipated that construction will commence in the second quarter of 2018.

Schools Building Projects Status

180. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the opening of the schools impacted by the collapse of a company (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14773/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The schools referred to by the Deputy form 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 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.

School Accommodation Provision

181. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he is taking to ensure adequate accommodation is provided to schools (details supplied) to ensure they can grow to full stream in cases in which there is a clear demand; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14897/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy will be aware, the schools to which the Deputy refers to were opened under the Patronage Divestment process and a case was submitted by the patron body of the schools in relation to enrolment levels.

In this regard, my Department wrote to the patron body on 23rd March last, indicating that these schools can be facilitated to develop over time with enrolment in each school to be managed within the constraints of the accommodation that can be made available.

The approach in relation to each school has been discussed and agreed with the patron body, which will work with these schools and with my Department in implementing the practical solutions involved in each case.

Legislative Process

182. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2016; the reason for the ongoing delay; the expected timeframe for its progression; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14900/18]

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

Officials from my Department are currently engaging with the Office of the Attorney General on the development of a number of legislative proposals which the Minister hopes to bring forward to Government for approval shortly.

The Bill will proceed to Report stage once work on these amendments has been finalised.

Garda Promotions

183. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to the fact the position for superintendent for the Nenagh district, County Tipperary, is still vacant; when this position will be filled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14512/18]

202. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to the fact that there is a vacant position for superintendent in Nenagh, County Tipperary; when this position will be filled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14763/18]

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

tions Nos. 183 and 202 together.

As the Deputy will appreciate, 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.

I am informed by the Commissioner that Nenagh Garda District forms part of the Tipperary Division and that as of the 28 February 2018 there were four Superintendents assigned to that Division.

The Deputy will be aware that 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 Commissioner shall keep the Authority fully informed with regard to vacancies likely to arise.

Criminal Law

184. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if adequate resourcing has been put in place to implement the new prostitution provisions in the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017 criminalising the purchase of sexual services and to ensure that An Garda Síochána and the National Protective Services Bureau are properly resourced to prepare prosecutions against both the purchasers and those that organise and profit from prostitution in a planned and targeted way; and if sufficient resourcing will be granted to run a public awareness campaign regarding the new law. [14513/18]

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

The question of a public awareness campaign is under consideration by my Department, in conjunction with An Garda Síochána and with other partners, including civil society. The Deputy will be aware of an awareness-raising campaign targeting purchasers of sex which took place in 2015. The ‘We Don’t Buy It’ campaign was part of a wider EU-funded project aimed at the prevention of human trafficking. Any future awareness-raising exercise could be expected to build on the experience of that campaign, highlighting the law changes since then.

Direct Provision System

185. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O’Mahony** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality

his views on whether Project Ireland 2040 falls short in delivering a proposal to provide an alternative to the direct provision scheme for asylum seekers and refugees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14521/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Direct Provision is the commonly used term to describe the support system in Ireland whereby State services including accommodation, food, health and education are directly provided to international protection applicants through the relevant Government Department or Agency.

We do not know who or how many people will arrive on our shores today or tomorrow seeking international protection but, because of our Direct Provision system, we know that all applicants, on behalf of the Irish people, are offered immediate shelter, full board accommodation and a range of services, such as health and education while their applications for international protection are in the course of being processed. Not every person who seeks international protection chooses to accept this offer, and many choose to live with colleagues, family or friends in communities across the country, as they are entitled to do.

If the system was simply disbanded, as some have been calling for, without an alternative replacement, the risks of consigning vulnerable people, who know neither our systems nor our language, to poverty, exploitation and homelessness are multiplied. No viable alternative has ever been put forward as to how the person who has unestablished needs who turns up here unexpectedly, can be looked after at an acceptable level of immediate care. In the absence of such an agreed process, any commitment to abolish a system that offers instant shelter and support, would pose a serious risk to the well-being of protection applicants and our undermine international obligations.

All systems require continual review and improvement and the government's programme of reform undertaken since 2014, is yielding results. Calls to replace our current system accompanied by references to an unspecified 'alternative system' add little of value in terms of improving services for those seeking international protection in Ireland. The Minister of State, Deputy Stanton, and I are working with our departmental officials and across the Government to enhance and develop the entire system continually in order that the best possible set of facilities and services can be provided to those in State care. We have published three item-by-item accounts on our implementation of the recommendations in the McMahon report. The final report in July showed the considerable progress made, with 98% of the recommendations advised as being implemented in full or in advanced progress. Improvements continue to be implemented across all the facilities and services provided by my Department to those in the protection process and this work will continue until it is completed. The opt-in to the EU's Recast Reception Directive will further improve our process, subject them to oversight and place our services on a common European standard. The opt-in process is continuing.

Garda Youth Diversion Projects

186. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if sufficient funding will be provided to a service (details supplied); if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the reduction or change in the provision of funding will have a serious impact on the persons to whom the service is provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14529/18]

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 identify and numbers of potential participants on GYDPs in the area will be key considerations here.

I can assure the Deputy that there are no proposals to reduce the level of funding currently available to the Irish Youth Justice Service (IYJS) to support the work of GYDPs, and I am satisfied that my Department has sufficient funding to enable the IYJS to meet current GYDP operating costs. In fact, as the overriding objective of the current change process is to ensure the provision of GYDP services to every child who needs them, it is likely that there will be an increased funding requirement for GYDPs in the coming years.

I can assure the Deputy that the new approach to GYDP provision which is being developed in preparation for the Call for Proposals will not reduce the level of service that already exists, or the importance of community involvement in its delivery. On the contrary, the intention is to build on, update and improve a very valuable service so that it is available to every child or young person in the country who requires it. This improvement to the service will have benefits for significant numbers of young people in the State who cannot currently access GYDP services. While certain aspects of the new service model have been determined, work is ongoing to complete the full details to be included in the Call for Proposals, which is expected to issue later this year. I am convinced that community ownership and participation of the projects is an essential dimension that must be preserved and strengthened in the working out of this process.

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, 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 being developed.

Closed-Circuit Television Systems Provision

187. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of community-based CCTV schemes funded by his Department since the new scheme was announced in April 2017; the number established nationally; the location of each of the established com-

munity based CCTV schemes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14535/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy is aware, my Department launched a Community-based CCTV grant-aid Scheme to assist groups in the establishment of community-based CCTV systems in their local areas.

There has been an increasing level of enquiries relating to the Scheme. Some 11 applications have been received to date and I understand that a number of other applications are currently being readied for submission.

4 applications under the Scheme have been approved to date, with approved funding totalling almost €120,000. A further 4 applications are under active consideration. The remaining 3 applications have been returned to the applicants concerned to enable them to provide the information necessary to qualify for grant-aid.

Of the 4 approved applications for funding, 3 separate schemes are to be established in County Wexford and 1 in County Wicklow.

Under the Scheme, eligible community groups can apply for grant-aid of up to 60% of the total capital cost of a proposed CCTV system, up to a maximum grant of €40,000.

Full details of the grant aid package including guidelines, application forms, code of practice and other relevant documentation are all available to download from my Department's website - www.justice.ie.

I am very conscious of the value that communities, especially rural communities, place on CCTV as a means of deterring crime and assisting in the detection of offenders and I would encourage interested groups to avail of the Scheme.

Departmental Staff Training

188. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the amount that his Department has spent on social media training and consultancy in each year since 2016. [14572/18]

189. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if training has been delivered in his Department on the use of social media (details supplied); the frequency and cost of this training; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14588/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 188 and 189 together.

There has been no training delivered on the use of social media in my Department and no costs have been incurred on social media training or consultancy since 2016. One member of staff in the Department's press office attended an event entitled "Campaigning for NGOs" hosted by a social media company in May 2017. Three members of staff in the press office attended a training session entitled "Mobile Journalism Techniques" hosted by Department of An Taoiseach in January 2018. There were no costs associated with either of these training sessions.

All new members of staff in my Department attend a half-day induction programme. As part of this programme, staff members are informed of their responsibilities under the Civil Service Code of Standards and Behaviours, including a discussion on the appropriate use of social media in the context of their work and their obligations as civil servants.

Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service Administration

190. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the average processing times for applications (details supplied). [14594/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the numbers of applications for naturalisation for the period from 2014 to date, broken down under the main categories referred to by the Deputy, are as provided in the following table:

-	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018*
EU/EEA (of which UK in brackets)	2,600 (50)	3,500 (70)	5,200 (570)	5,000 (860)	1,000 (170)
Non EU/EEA	12,900	9,200	7,900	6,900	1,500
Total Applications Received	15,500	12,700	13,100	11,900	2,500

* 2018 figures are provisional.

Records are not maintained which would facilitate the production of the further detailed information requested by the Deputy. The retrieval and compilation of this information would necessitate a disproportionate use of time and resources which could not be justified in circumstances where the priority is to deal with the cases on hand.

The granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is governed by the provisions of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended. Every application for naturalisation is considered on its individual merits and in accordance with the provisions of the Act. As the grant of naturalisation is a privilege and an honour which confers certain rights and entitlements, not only within the State but also at European Union level, it is important that appropriate procedures are in place to preserve the integrity of the process. There is no preferential treatment in respect of particular nationalities.

It is recognised that all applicants for citizenship would wish to have a decision on their application without delay. While most straightforward cases are generally processed within six months, the nature of the naturalisation process is such that, for a broad range of reasons, some cases will take longer than others to process. In some instances completing the necessary checks can take a considerable period of time particularly with regard to establishing whether the statutory conditions for naturalisation as set out in the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act, such as good character and lawful residence, are satisfied.

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

Garda Civilian Staff Data

191. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of civilian staff employed by An Garda Síochána; and the number of such staff employed in each of the years 2013 to 2017, in tabular form. [14599/18]

192. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí carrying out full-time clerical work in An Garda Síochána in each of the years 2013 to 2017, in tabular form. [14600/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 191 and 192 together.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

The most recent figure available in respect of civilian staff employed by An Garda Síochána indicates that there are 2,254 full-time equivalents in the organisation as of 28 February 2018. This represents an increase of 255 as of the end of 2016.

The Commissioner has advised that the number of civilian staff for the years 2013-2017 is as follows:

Year	Total Civilian Strength
2013	2072
2014	2055
2015	2007
2016	1999
2017	2192

As the Deputy will be aware the Government approved the Five Year Reform and High-level Workforce Plan for An Garda Síochána in July 2016. The plan encompasses the agreed recommendations of the Garda Inspectorate Report “Changing Policing in Ireland” and the Programme for a Partnership Government commitment to expand the Garda work force. In relation to civilian staff the Plan sets a medium term target of 20% civilians of the overall Garda workforce by 2021. This translates to a doubling the number of civilian staff from 2,000 to 4,000 over the period. This will bring An Garda Síochána more in line with international norms and ensure that trained Gardaí are not engaging in administrative and technical duties which could be done by suitably qualified civilian staff. In this regard the Inspectorate identified some 1,500 posts that may be suitable for redeployment.

The 20% target is to be achieved through a twin-track approach: firstly, through a “civilian by default” policy to be adopted in relation to the filling of all new posts other than operational policing posts and for non-operational policing posts that become vacant, and secondly, redeployment of Gardaí and backfilling by suitably qualified civilians where necessary.

Thus far the Commissioner has received sanction in accordance with the statutory framework under the Garda Síochána Act 2005 for over 280 new posts to address critical skills and capacity gaps in the organisation and to backfill posts occupied by redeployed Gardaí. An Garda Síochána is currently engaging with the Policing Authority in relation to approval for a further 116 new civilian posts. It is also through a workforce planning exercise identifying further priority areas that would benefit from civilian staff with specific skillset

To support the redeployment programme An Garda Síochána conducted an organisation deployment survey in February 2017 which identified 2,000 roles for further examination to clarify if they could be undertaken by civilian staff. Of those, 871 roles were identified as ad-

ministrative. The Commissioner has established a dedicated Project Team to drive momentum on redeployment. That Team is conducted a detailed review of the survey results to identify specific roles for redeployment on a phased basis. It is of course important to keep in mind that redeployment must be approached fairly and with regard to why the member is in an administrative role. It may be, for example that the member is on light duties due to a medical condition or is pregnant. It may also be the case that some members may require refresher training to support them in returning to the front-line. The Team is working to address these challenges and is engaging with the Garda Associations.

I am encouraged that the number of civilians working in An Garda Síochána continues to increase. Funding for a further 500 additional civilians was provided in Budget 2018. The Government is committed to meeting the 20% target and I have made it clear to the Commissioner that I expect an acceleration this year to ensure that the target is met by 2021.

Residency Permits

193. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of an application by a person (details supplied) for residency status; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14615/18]

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 has had their permission to remain in the State renewed for a further one year period to 19 March 2019. This decision was conveyed in writing to the person concerned by registered post dated 20 March 2018.

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

Consultancy Contracts

194. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the value of contracts for services awarded to a company (details supplied) by his Department since 2010, in tabular form; and the type of work undertaken by the company. [14633/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I can advise the Deputy that my Department has not procured services from the company in question during the period referred to.

Garda Training

195. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí by county that have requested additional training to drive under blue lights for the past five years; the number that have received the requested training; the average wait time for training; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14708/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for carrying on and managing and controlling generally the administration and business of An Garda Síochána including Garda training and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

I have sought a report from the Garda Commissioner in relation to the information requested by the Deputy and I will write directly to the Deputy when the report is to hand.

Migrant Integration

196. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the obligation on local authorities to have in place a migration integration strategy; the consequences for local authorities that fail to have such a policy in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14720/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): Although I do not have direct responsibility in relation to the actions of Local Authorities, I take it the Deputy is referring to the Action 52 of the Migrant Integration Strategy, which states that "Integration strategies will be updated". Local Authorities are the Responsible Bodies for the implementation of this action.

All actions will be undertaken within the framework of the National Strategy. A Monitoring and Coordination Committee has been established to support the process of implementing the Migrant Integration Strategy. The Committee, which comprises representatives of relevant Government Departments, State Agencies and the NGO sector, oversees the implementation of the strategy. The Terms of Reference for this committee include: the review of all actions; the monitoring of progress; assessing whether or not further action is needed; and to make recommendations for adding or changing actions. Progress on the implementation of the actions in the Strategy will be reviewed at the end of 2018 and a report prepared for Government.

In addition, under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) 2014-2020, my Department supports the 'Immigrant Council of Ireland' with a grant award of €150,000, which includes an objective to monitor, encourage and support the development and implementation of Local Authority Integration Strategies over a three year period. It is envisaged that this project will also bring together all Local Authorities in Ireland to discuss challenges, opportunities for collaboration and share good practice examples.

EU Directives

197. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the State's application to take part in Directive 2013/33/EU; when it is expected the process will be completed; the provisions which will be put in place to allow asylum seekers enter the workplace on the conclusion of the process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14721/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Supreme Court Judgment acknowledges that a constitutional right to seek employment exists where no temporal limit is set for the processing of protection applications. The Government decided to utilise this opportunity to significantly broaden the scope of reform required by the judgement and to ask the Oireachtas for permission to opt-in to the EU (recast) Reception Conditions Directive. This would bring Ireland in line with our EU partners and the standards of reception conditions

for protection applicants, by placing the entire system on a legislative basis, which will be subject to EU oversight. This is another important reform in the process undertaken by government since 2014. Opting in will provide the mechanism not only in addressing the issue of labour market access but also extending to children's rights, rights for unaccompanied minors, vulnerable people, appeals processes, healthcare and education provision.

During the course of the debate in the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice & Equality, and in both the Seanad and the Dáil, I outlined the proposal and rationale for opting into the EU (recast) Reception Conditions Directive under the terms of Protocol 21, annexed to the EU Treaties. I also outlined the compliance process involved with the EU Commission which they require, and which will take up to four months to complete. The Oireachtas approved the opt-in on 23rd January and the following day our Ambassador delivered the formal notification to the Commission and European Council.

Because of this timeframe, it was necessary to address the situation that would exist from the 9th February until the opt-in process is completed. From February 9th protection applicants would be treated equally to all other third country nationals wishing to work here and they could apply for an employment permit under the regulations established and administered by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation.

In addition to accessing the employment permits regime, I used my executive power to provide an additional access for qualified applicants to engage in self-employment on terms that can be mirrored in a permanent scheme once the process of compliance with the Directive is completed with the EU Commission.

As outlined, these are interim measures until the four month EU opt-in process is complete. Once this happens, access to the labour market will be underpinned by EU law. The implementation group, chaired by my Department and with representatives from all relevant Departments and Agencies, is currently working through the details, which will allow me to introduce, subject to Government approval, a less restrictive access to different categories of work than the employment permits regime, which is not under my remit, which will apply in the interim period.

Widening access to the labour market is a complex issue, needing to take account of a range of factors such as maintaining the integrity of the Common Travel Area, potential impacts of Brexit and any impacts on the existing employment permits regime for non-EEA nationals. These considerations will be balanced with meeting the Directive's requirement of granting effective access to the labour market, the wellbeing of protection applicants, being cognisant of current labour market shortages, the skill set of applicants and employment opportunities available in both urban and rural communities.

Asylum Applications Data

198. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the process for asylum seekers to apply for an employment permit first opened (details supplied); the number of asylum seekers that have applied for a permit under this process; the number of applications which were for a self-employed permit; the number of applications which have been successful; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14722/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Supreme Court's decision to remove the absolute prohibition on International Protection applicants seeking access to the labour market took effect on February 9th of this year.

From that day it became possible for International Protection applicants or their prospective employers to apply for an employment permit on the same basis as any non-EEA national. My Department has no role or function in this area. We do not set the regulations for employment permits or access to this permission, as this is done by my colleague the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation. As a result my Department cannot receive or open applications for employment permits.

Following Government approval, I used my executive powers to introduce an administrative scheme to allow access for qualified applicants to engage in self-employment. The total number of Self Employment applications received is 401, of which 290 have been granted.

Immigration Data

199. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons held for immigrant offences in each of the years 2014 to 2017; the medical, legal and other rights afforded to immigration detainees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14723/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by An Garda Síochána that it is not possible in the time available to provide the details requested by the Deputy and that efforts to do so would require the expenditure of a disproportionate and inordinate amount of Garda resources and time. However, the Garda National Immigration Bureau are examining what available information can be compiled and I will revert to the Deputy as soon as possible.

The provisions of the Criminal Justice Act, 1984 (Treatment of Persons in Custody in Garda Síochána Stations) Regulations, 1987 and 2006 provide rules and procedures regarding how a person must be treated while in custody in Garda Síochána stations. These Regulations apply to persons who have been arrested at ports of entry to the State and are subsequently detained at a Garda Síochána station.

Immigration Controls

200. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on the recently published report from Nasc Ireland, Immigration Detention and Border Control in Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14724/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I note that the report to which the Deputy refers which was published on 14 March 2018. The report refers to an earlier report from 10 years ago and draws conclusions from sample cases over a two year period. My officials will study its contents over the coming period. Indeed, I am happy to note that officials of my Department, the Prison Service and other agencies participated in key stakeholder interviews for the purposes of the report.

As the Deputy will appreciate, every State has a duty to protect its borders and to refuse entry to those persons not entitled to enter the State. This is a fundamental exercise of State sovereignty necessary to protect the security of the State and to prevent illegal immigration.

The exercise of powers in this area is subject to the law and respect for individual rights. Similarly, the seeking of International Protection is governed by national and international laws.

I would point out that detention in a Garda Station or prison of a person refused entry to

the State is undertaken as a last resort. Indeed, there is a statutory obligation to return a person refused entry permission as soon as is practicable. Most persons are returned on the same day that they are refused entry.

It is also worth noting that An Garda Síochána in conjunction with the Office of Public Works are undertaking a project at Dublin Airport (by far the busiest point of entry to the State) to refurbish and fit-out an existing facility to provide a Garda Station, office accommodation and detention facilities.

Finally, it should be noted that the numbers of passengers arriving at Dublin airport (by far the busiest point of entry to the State and with the greatest number of decisions refusing entry permission) has risen markedly in the last number of years. Overall, passenger numbers at Dublin airport have grown by 58% since 2011, from 18.7 million to 29.6 million. However, the numbers refused permission to enter the State as a percentage of overall incoming passengers has remained virtually unchanged at approximately 0.025% of incoming passengers. In this context, the sample size used in the report is extremely small when measured against the number of passengers encountered in any period.

Statutory Instruments

201. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason there was no consultation with a representative organisation (details supplied) prior to the signing of a statutory instrument; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14760/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): I wish to advise the Deputy that Statutory Instrument 646 of 2017, entitled Firearms (Storage of Firearms and Ammunition by Firearms Dealers) Regulations 2017, was signed into law by me and circulated to firearms dealers.

These Regulations give effect to minimum standards for the safe and secure storage of firearms and ammunition in the premises of firearms dealers. They recognise that firearms dealers are entitled to be in possession of large quantities of firearms but require them to conduct business from a premises that has been constructed to a high standard. The Regulations also recognise the different categories of firearms dealers and scales the requirements depending on the quantities of ammunition and firearms being stored. For example, a time lock requirement does not apply to those dealers who deal only in small quantities of ammunition.

This Statutory Instrument derives from the powers conferred under Sections 9(10) and (11) of the Firearms Act 1925, which were inserted by Section 38 of the Criminal Justice Act 2006. Section 9(10) provides “The Minister, after consultation with the Commissioner, may by regulations specify minimum standards to be complied with in relation to premises in which a firearms dealer carries on a business or proposes to do so”.

Section 9(11) provides “The minimum standards shall be determined by reference to

- (a) the security of the premises
- (b) their safety, and
- (c) their standard of construction,

and having regard to their use for, as the case may be, the manufacture, repair, testing, proving or sale of firearms or ammunition”.

These provisions were passed by the Oireachtas on 5 July 2006 and signed into law by the President on 16 July 2006 and commenced on 1 January 2008.

The Regulations were developed following consultation with a sub-group of the Firearms Consultative Panel (FCP) consisting of registered firearms dealers. It was agreed by the FCP when this sub group was being established that the firearms dealers on the Panel at the time should sit on the sub-group for the purpose of examining this particular issue. Firearms dealers' premises were visited in fourteen counties prior to and during the drafting of this legislation. The dealers who sat on the sub-group are knowledgeable of the security that they and their colleagues utilise. Additionally, An Garda Síochána who were represented on the group have extensive experience with regard to security measures available in the industry and particularly in firearms dealers' premises.

The FCP is a consultative group and it was never the intention that the legislation would be dependent on the FCP's support. I should add that I am currently reviewing the future structure and membership of the FCP and submissions have been invited from the relevant interest groups.

The Commissioner of An Garda Síochána has endorsed the security measures contained in this Regulation and has advised that the inclusion of a requirement for a time-lock on the strong room door will deter criminal activity and require the use of greater resources by any person attempting to access firearms or ammunition illegally. Similar security measures have been applied successfully elsewhere, e.g. in banks, pharmacies and the jewellery sector.

In order to minimise the financial impact, a lead-in time of twelve months (to 1 February 2019) for compliance has been included in the Regulation in order to permit dealers sufficient time to comply with the legislation.

I wish to advise the Deputy that I have no plans to amend these regulations which have been introduced as a public safety measure.

Question No. 202 answered with Question No. 183.

Garda Training

203. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the cost of training 100 new Garda recruits; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14786/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will be aware that it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for carrying on and managing and controlling generally the administration and business of An Garda Síochána, including by arranging for the recruitment and training of the members of An Garda Síochána. I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

I have been informed by the Garda authorities that annual costs for new Garda recruits include a basic weekly allowance of €184. After 32 weeks of training, Garda Recruits are attested and move on to the first point of the Garda pay scale €29,669 rising to a maximum of €51,693 per annum after 19 years.

I am further informed that the cost of training recruits is subsumed into the overall training costs of the Garda College and as such are not easily identifiable on a separate basis. The total cost of running the Garda College in 2017 was approximately €32m, which includes the salary costs of all College personnel and other establishment costs.

Garda Expenditure

204. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the full first year cost of hiring 100 additional gardaí after they have completed their training; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14787/18]

205. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the full second year cost of hiring 100 additional gardaí; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14788/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 204 and 205 together.

The Deputy will be aware that it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for carrying on and managing and controlling generally the administration and business of An Garda Síochána, including by arranging for the recruitment and training of the members of An Garda Síochána. I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

I have been informed by the Garda authorities that payroll costs for new Garda recruits include a basic allowance of €184 per week. After 32 weeks of training, Garda Recruits are attested and move on to the first point of the Garda pay scale €29,669 rising to a maximum of €51,693 per annum after 19 years. They may also qualify for other allowances depending on their assignments.

I am further informed that the annual payroll cost of 100 new recruits in their first year including that training period (assuming a commencement date of 1st January each year) is €2,293,888; and in their second year €4,563,704. This figure includes Employer’s PRSI and an estimation of allowances which the recruits may qualify for following attestation. The annual cost will increase as the members’ move up the Garda Pay scale each year.

Garda Civilian Staff Data

206. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the full cost of recruiting an additional 100 civilian staff to An Garda Síochána; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14789/18]

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

I have been informed by the Garda authorities that the total cost of recruiting an additional 100 civilian staff to an Garda Síochána amounts to approximately €4,300,000. This was calculated by using an estimated average cost per civilian of €43,000.

Electronic Tagging

207. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of prisoners that were subjected to electronic tagging in 2017; the number of days electronic tag-

ging was used on prisoners; the cost of electronic tagging in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14790/18]

208. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the items covered in the contract cost of €258,000 for 20 electronic tags for 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14791/18]

210. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons in custody that were electronically monitored while on temporary release in 2017; the number of days each person was on release while electronically monitored; the cost per prisoner per day; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14793/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 207, 208 and 210 together.

I am to advise the Deputy that Part 10 of the Criminal Justice Act 2006 provides for the introduction of electronic monitoring.

I am advised by the Irish Prison Service that following a competitive tender in 2014, a contract was awarded for the supply of electronic monitoring of prisoners.

Electronic monitoring is used to monitor prisoners who have been granted Temporary Release including for the purpose of the Community Return/Community Support Scheme. The system is also used to monitor some hospital in-patients who have been granted temporary release from Prison.

The current contract allows for the provision of up to 50 electronic tags to the Irish Prison Service. During 2017, there were 59 prisoners electronically monitored while on temporary release. The total cost of this service to the Irish Prison Service in 2017 was €166,117. The contract requires a minimum usage of 10 tags. The Irish Prison Service currently have 20 tags available for their use and can avail of up to 50 tags if required. The contract includes the supply of the electronic tagging devices, fitting and removal of the tags on the prisoner with a monitoring and reporting service. The tagging devices also come with a charging device and in some cases where a curfew is required a beacon will also be required to be fitted in the prisoners' residence.

The average cost per prisoner is impacted upon by the total number of days per year that prisoners are electronically monitored. In 2017 electronic tagging devices were deployed 4,616 times, involving 59 prisoners at an average cost of €36 per deployment.

It has not been possible in the timeframe allowed to collate and provide a breakdown of the precise details in respect of the number of days each prisoner was released on temporary release and the costs associated, as this would entail a manual check of the individual records for each of the 4,616 times the electronic tagging devices were in use. I will revert to the Deputy as soon as this information has been compiled.

It is important to stress that the electronic monitoring arrangements that operate within the Irish Prison system are different to those envisaged in legislation under the Bail Acts (as amended) where significantly different constitutional and operational considerations apply.

EU Directives

209. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the EU direc-

tives not yet transposed into law; the deadline imposed by the EU for the transposition of same; the estimated date for transposition into law; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14792/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): In respect of the Deputy's question please see the following table which outlines the EU directives that come within the remit of my Department which have not yet been transposed into law, the estimated date for transposition into law and the EU deadline for transposition of same.

EU Directive	Estimated Date for Transposition into Law	EU Deadline for Transposition
Directive 2017/1371/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2017 on the fight against fraud to the Union's financial interests by means of criminal law.	Q3 2019	6 July 2019
Directive 2017/853/EU of 17 May 2017 amending Directive 91/477/EEC on control of the acquisition and possession of weapons.	By transposition deadline	14 September 2018 (except for amendments to Article 4(3) and Article 4(4) of Directive 91/477/EEC which have a deadline of 14 December 2019)
Directive 2017/541/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 March 2017 on combating terrorism and replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/475/JHA and amending Council Decision 2005/671/JHA.	Ireland was unable to opt-in to the measure in early 2016 as negotiations were ongoing to form a new Government following the General Election.*	8 September 2018*
Directive 2016/681/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the use of passenger name record (PNR) data for the prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of terrorist offences and serious crime.	By transposition deadline	25 May 2018
Directive 2016/680/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data by competent authorities for the purposes of the prevention, investigation, detection or prosecution of criminal offences or the execution of criminal penalties, and of the free movement of such data, and repealing Council Framework Decision 2008/977/JHA.	By transposition deadline	25 May 2018
Directive 2015/849/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2015 on the prevention of the use of the financial system for the purposes of money laundering or terrorist financing, amending Regulation (EU) No 648/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council, and repealing Directive 2005/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council and Commission Directive 2006/70/EC.	Q4 2018	26 June 2017

EU Directive	Estimated Date for Transposition into Law	EU Deadline for Transposition
EU Directive 2014/62/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 May 2014 on the protection of the euro and other currencies against counterfeiting by criminal law, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2000/383/JHA.	December 2018	23 May 2016
Directive 2014/42/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 3 April 2014 on the freezing and confiscation of instrumentalities and proceeds of crime in the European Union.	Substantially transposed by SI 540/2017 on 28 November 2017. Some further minor amendments are likely to be required.	4 October 2016
Directive 2013/33/EU EU Reception Conditions Directive	The Oireachtas approved an opt-in by the State to the EU (recast) Reception Conditions Directive (2013/33/EU) on 23 January 2018. **	July 2015 **
Directive 2012/29/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime.	May 2018***	16 November 2015

* The Criminal Justice (Terrorist Offences) Bill is included in the Government Legislative Programme. This legislation must be in place before the EU Commission, in accordance with Protocol 21.4, can confirm Ireland's participation in the measure thus enabling transposition to take place. The September 2018 transposition date relates to those Member States bound by the Directive from its enactment.

** The July 2015 transposition date related to those Member States bound by the Directive from its enactment. From the formal date of notification of our wish to accept and be bound by the Directive, which was made on 24 January 2018, the EU Commission has a four month period to complete the compliance and assessment procedure to confirm our participation in the Directive. A Statutory Instrument is being drafted for transposition. This will require approval by both the Government and the European Commission before the Directive enters into force in the State.

*** The legislation transposing this Directive, the Criminal Justice (Victims of Crime) Act 2017, has been enacted. There are two relevant provisions still to be commenced and it is anticipated that this will happen by May 2018.

Question No. 210 answered with Question No. 207.

Garda Reserve

211. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the most recent Garda Reserve recruitment drive; the number of persons who applied; the number of applicants who were successful; the status of the training of successful applicants; when the training of all successful applicants will be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14794/18]

215. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the strength of the Garda Reserve by division as of 26 March 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14798/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 211 and 215 together.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the recruitment and training of the Garda Reserve and the distribution of resources, including personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

I am advised by the Commissioner that the strength of the Reserve on the 28 February 2018 was 569. It is regrettable that there has been a substantial reduction in the strength of the Reserve in recent years from a peak of 1,164 in 2013. The fall-off arises from a range of factors, not least the lifting in 2014 of the moratorium on recruitment of trainee Gardaí which has affected Reserve numbers in two ways - firstly some serving Reserves have successfully applied to become trainee Gardaí, and secondly, resources in both An Garda Síochána and in the Public Appointment Service have been focused on delivering an accelerated programme of recruitment of full time members of An Garda Síochána.

I am sure that the Deputy will agree, notwithstanding the very valuable contribution of Reserve members throughout the country, that it was the right decision, with finite resources, to prioritise the running of recruitment campaigns to replenish the full-time ranks of An Garda Síochána over the last three years.

The “Programme for a Partnership Government” includes a commitment to double the Garda Reserve to act in a supportive role undertaking local patrols and crime reduction measures. In line with this, the Government has in place a plan to achieve a Reserve strength of 2,000 by 2021. With the plan to reach 15,000 Garda members well on track it was possible for the Commissioner and the Public Appointments Service (PAS) to undertake a new recruitment campaign for Garda Reserves last March which attracted 2,394 applicants, of whom 498 successfully completed the initial stages carried out by PAS. These applications are currently being processed by the Garda Appointments Office. The time frame for this can vary due to a number of factors including the length of the vetting process which may, for example, be more time consuming if the applicant has resided abroad or is deferred for medical reasons. It is expected that the first class will commence training in the Garda College in the coming months.

In conjunction with the major expansion of the Reserve over the next number of years, we must ensure that it is used to optimum effect to support effective policing. To inform future decisions around the use of the Reserve An Garda Síochána is conducting a strategic review as a matter of priority with a view to completion in the first half of the year as set out in the Policing Plan 2018. As a first step, the Garda Executive has taken a decision to transfer the management of the Reserve to the Assistant Commissioner with responsibility for Community Engagement. This is intended to ensure that its development and deployment is viewed more broadly through a community policing lens. This is a very welcome step as it is my strong view that the greatest dividend to be gained from the Reserve is in terms of a visible presence on the ground engaging with local communities.

For the Deputy’s information I have set out in the attached table the number of Garda Reserves by Division as of 28 February 2018, the latest date for which figures are currently available.

Garda Reserve Strength 28 February 2018

Division	Total
DMR South Central	35
DMR North Central	35

Division	Total
DMR North	43
DMR East	9
DMR South	17
DMR West	26
Waterford	19
Wexford	17
Tipperary	16
Kilkenny/Carlow	26
Cork City	42
Cork North	13
Cork West	8
Kerry	20
Limerick	29
Donegal	15
Cavan/Monaghan	11
Sligo/Leitrim	17
Louth	24
Clare	6
Mayo	19
Galway	31
Roscommon/Longford	7
Westmeath	12
Meath	16
Kildare	20
Laois/Offaly	16
Wicklow	20
Total	569

Garda Recruitment

212. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the timeline for recruitment of gardaí; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14795/18]

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

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.

Taking account of projected retirements, reaching a strength of 15,000 by 2021 will require some 1,600 new Garda members to be recruited on a phased basis over the next two years in addition to the 2,800 that will have been recruited by the end of this year since the re-opening of the Garda College in September 2014.

I am informed by the Commissioner that 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. I am pleased to say that Garda numbers, taking account of retirements, increased to 13,551 at the end of 2017 - a net increase of over 600 since the end of 2016.

I am also pleased that funding is in place to maintain this high level of investment in the Garda workforce to ensure that the vision of an overall workforce of 21,000 by 2021 remains on track. This year 800 new Garda recruits will enter the Garda College in four intakes of 200, the first of which entered in January. Also 800 Garda trainees are scheduled to attest during the year with the first class of over 200 attesting on 16 March last. I am pleased to say that this investment 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 Garda Division, in the coming years.

For the Deputy's information I have set out in the following tables the details of the Garda recruit intakes and attestations for the remainder of 2018.

	Scheduled Garda Recruits Intakes 2018
Date	Numbers
Apr 2018	200
July 2018	200
Oct 2018	200

	Scheduled Garda Trainee Attestations 2018
Date	Expected No. of Trainees
June 2018	200
Sept 2018	200
Nov 2018	200

Garda Civilian Staff Data

213. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of civilians in the workforce of An Garda Síochána as of 26 March 2018; the way in which this compares to the recommended number of civilians by the 2015 Garda Inspectorate report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14796/18]

214. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of

positions within An Garda Síochána that have been earmarked to be filled by civilians that remain unfilled; when the positions became vacant; when it is expected to fill the positions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14797/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 213 and 214 together.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

The most recent figure available in respect of civilian staff employed by An Garda Síochána indicates that there are 2,254 full-time equivalents in the organisation as of 28 February 2018. This represents an increase of 255 as of the end of 2016.

The Commissioner has advised that the number of civilian staff for the years 2015-2017 is as follows:

Year	Total number of civilian staff (FTEs)
2015	2,007
2016	1,999
2017	2,192

As the Deputy will be aware the Government approved the Five Year Reform and High-level Workforce Plan for An Garda Síochána in July 2016. The plan encompasses the agreed recommendations of the Garda Inspectorate Report “Changing Policing in Ireland” and the Programme for a Partnership Government commitment to expand the Garda work force. In relation to civilian staff the Plan sets a medium term target of 20% civilians of the overall Garda workforce by 2021, This translates to a doubling the number of civilian staff from 2,000 to 4,000 over the period. This will bring An Garda Síochána more in line with international norms and ensure that trained Gardaí are not engaging in administrative and technical duties which could be done by suitably qualified civilian staff. In this regard the Inspectorate identified some 1,500 posts that may be suitable for redeployment.

The 20% target is to be achieved through a twin-track approach: firstly, through a “civilian by default” policy to be adopted in relation to the filling of all new posts other than operational policing posts and for non-operational policing posts that become vacant, and secondly, redeployment of Gardaí and backfilling by suitably qualified civilians where necessary.

Thus far the Commissioner has received sanction in accordance with the statutory framework under the Garda Síochána Act 2005 for over 280 new posts to address critical skills and capacity gaps in the organisation and to backfill posts occupied by redeployed Gardaí. An Garda Síochána is currently engaging with the Policing Authority in relation to approval for a further 116 new civilian posts. It is also through a workforce planning exercise identifying further priority areas that would benefit from civilian staff with specific skillset

To support the redeployment programme An Garda Síochána conducted an organisation deployment survey in February 2017 which identified 2,000 roles for further examination to clarify if they could be undertaken by civilian staff. Of those, 871 roles were identified as administrative. The Commissioner has established a dedicated Project Team to drive momentum on redeployment. That Team is conducted a detailed review of the survey results to identify specific roles for redeployment on a phased basis. It is of course important to keep in mind that redeployment must be approached fairly and with regard to why the member is in an administrative role. It may be, for example that the member is on light duties due to a medical condition or is pregnant. It may also be the case that some members may require refresher training to sup-

port them in returning to the front-line. The Team is working to address these challenges and is engaging with the Garda Associations.

I am encouraged that the number of civilians working in An Garda Síochána continues to increase. Funding for a further 500 additional civilians was provided in Budget 2018. The Government is committed to meeting the 20% target and I have made it clear to the Commissioner that I expect an acceleration this year to ensure that the target is met by 2021.

Question No. 215 answered with Question No. 211.

Departmental Advertising Expenditure

216. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the amount spent by his Department on third party public relations advice, communications advice, online advertising and public awareness campaigns from January 2017 to date in 2018, by month and company engaged in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14800/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The table below details relevant expenditure in my Department since January 2017. The work contracted has allowed valuable public attention to be drawn to important issues such as human trafficking and domestic violence.

DATE	EXPENDITURE	SERVICE	COMPANY CONTRACTED
01/02/2017	€5,018	Media buying services for National Awareness Campaign on Domestic Violence	PHD Media (Ireland) Ltd
01/03/2017	€3,245.62	Realistic Imitation Firearms Public Consultation on legislative proposals	Mediavest
01/03/2017	€20,461	Public information notice in national media re. Call for funding applications for National Funding to Promote the Integration of Immigrants and the Communities Integration Fund	Mediavest
01/03/2017	€40,473	Media buying services for National Awareness Campaign on Domestic Violence	PHD Media (Ireland) Ltd
01/03/2017	€20,171	Creative advertising services for National Awareness Campaign on Domestic Violence	TBWA Dublin
01/04/2017	€21,012	Media buying services for National Awareness Campaign on Domestic Violence	PHD Media (Ireland) Ltd
01/04/2017	€7,862	Creative advertising services for National Awareness Campaign on Domestic Violence	TBWA Dublin
01/05/2017	€184,221	Media buying services for National Awareness Campaign on Domestic Violence	PHD Media (Ireland) Ltd
01/05/2017	€40,329	Creative advertising services for National Awareness Campaign on Domestic Violence	TBWA Dublin

Questions - Written Answers

DATE	EXPENDITURE	SERVICE	COMPANY CONTRACTED
01/05/2017	€462.48	Blue blindfold campaign against human trafficking campaign materials	Kilmartins Print
01/06/2017	€5,163	Creative advertising services for National Awareness Campaign on Domestic Violence	TBWA Dublin
01/07/2017	€61,455	Media buying services for National Awareness Campaign on Domestic Violence	PHD Media (Ireland) Ltd
01/07/2017	€295.20	Blue blindfold campaign against human trafficking campaign materials	LogoPrint
01/07/2017	€412.05	Blue blindfold campaign against human trafficking campaign materials	LogoPrint
01/08/2017	€22,867	Media buying services for National Awareness Campaign on Domestic Violence	PHD Media (Ireland) Ltd
01/08/2017	€7,400	Creative advertising services for National Awareness Campaign on Domestic Violence	TBWA Dublin
01/08/2017	€339.48	Blue blindfold campaign against human trafficking campaign materials	Kilmartins Print
01/08/2017	€381.25	Blue blindfold campaign against human trafficking campaign materials	Kilmartins Print
01/09/2017	€45,095	Media buying services for National Awareness Campaign on Domestic Violence	PHD Media (Ireland) Ltd
01/09/2017	€4,041.78	Blue blindfold campaign against human trafficking campaign materials	LogoPrint
01/09/2017	€517.75	Blue blindfold campaign against human trafficking campaign materials	Kilmartins Print
01/10/2017	€22,075	Media buying services for National Awareness Campaign on Domestic Violence	PHD Media (Ireland) Ltd
01/10/2017	€24,454	Creative advertising services for National Awareness Campaign on Domestic Violence	TBWA Dublin
01/10/2017	€179.99	Blue blindfold campaign against human trafficking campaign materials	Spike badges
01/10/2017	€179.99	Blue blindfold campaign against human trafficking campaign materials	Spike badges
01/10/2017	€3,733.05	Blue blindfold campaign against human trafficking campaign materials	LogoPrint
01/10/2017	€1,291.50	Article - background and awareness of human trafficking	Metro Eireann (print and online)

DATE	EXPENDITURE	SERVICE	COMPANY CONTRACTED
01/10/2017	€744.15	Blue blindfold campaign against human trafficking campaign materials	Marketing Impressions
01/10/2017	€424.01	Blue blindfold campaign against human trafficking campaign materials	Kilmartins Print
01/11/2017	€36,676.44	Fireworks Information Notice regarding the severe criminal penalties that apply for igniting illegal fireworks and the possession of same with intent to supply others	Mediavest
01/11/2017	€193,277	Media buying services for National Awareness Campaign on Domestic Violence	PHD Media (Ireland) Ltd
01/11/2017	€1,510.44	Ad re: Review of Administration of Civil Justice	Irish Independent
01/11/2017	€1,363.01	Ad re: Review of Administration of Civil Justice	Irish Times
01/11/2017	€1,020.31	Ad re: Review of Administration of Civil Justice	Irish Examiner
01/12/2017	€6,275	Public information notices in national media re. CERD public consultation	Mediavest
01/12/2017	€315,502	Media buying services for National Awareness Campaign on Domestic Violence	PHD Media (Ireland) Ltd
01/12/2017	€62,924	Creative advertising services for National Awareness Campaign on Domestic Violence	TBWA Dublin
01/12/2017	€49,645.42	Awareness Campaign for "Someone Like Me" Primary Schools Art Competition. For details see: http://www.someonelikemecompetition.ie/	Real Nation
01/11/2017	€3,029.25	Advertising for Gender Pay Gap consultation	Mediavest t/a Spark Foundry
01/01/2018	€7,000.00	Payment to Act to Prevent Trafficking, for the Department of Justice and Equality funded UN.GIFT box human trafficking awareness campaign	Association of Missionaries and Religious of Ireland
01/02/2018	€5,018	Media buying services for National Awareness Campaign on Domestic Violence	PHD Media (Ireland) Ltd
01/02/2018	€18,556	Creative advertising services for National Awareness Campaign on Domestic Violence	TBWA Dublin
01/03/2018	€5,018	Creative advertising services for National Awareness Campaign on Domestic Violence	TBWA Dublin
01/03/2018	€3,378	Creative advertising services for National Awareness Campaign on Domestic Violence	TBWA Dublin

DATE	EXPENDITURE	SERVICE	COMPANY CONTRACTED
TOTAL	€1,254,497		

Garda Deployment

217. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when additional Garda personnel and resources will be allocated to the Cavan and Monaghan Division; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14801/18]

218. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when additional resources will be provided to the Cavan and Monaghan Garda Division to develop an adequate community policing service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14802/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 217 and 218 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 Cavan/Monaghan Division on 28 February 2018, the latest date for which information is readily available, was 329 of whom 2 are designated as full-time Community Garda. There are also 11 Garda Reserves and 38 Garda civilian staff attached to the Cavan/Monaghan 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.

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.

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 53 to the Cavan/Monaghan Division, 13 of whom were allocated from the last attestation on the 16 March 2018. 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 Cavan/Monaghan Division.

Residency Permits

219. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if all outstanding documentation has been furnished by a person (details supplied); if their case for naturalisation and long-term residency will now be processed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14808/18]

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 renewal 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 8 March 2018. INIS has been in contact with the person concerned seeking further information and documentation on 23 March 2018.

No correspondence has been submitted to date in response to the request. The application will be considered further on receipt of all of the required documentation.

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

Naturalisation Applications

220. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if provision will be made for a person (details supplied) to apply for naturalisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14809/18]

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

The granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is governed by the provisions of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended. Section 15 of the Act provides that the Minister may, in his absolute discretion, grant an application for a certificate of naturalisation provided certain statutory conditions as set out in the Act are fulfilled. It is open to any individual to make an application for naturalisation if and when they are in a position to satisfy the statutory conditions.

The statutory conditions include that the applicant himself or herself must have had one year's continuous residency in the State immediately before the date of application and, during the eight years immediately preceding that period, have had a further total residence in the State amounting to four years. Periods of residence outside the State are not reckonable for naturalisation purposes. Every application for a certificate of naturalisation is considered on its own merits having regard to the statutory conditions set out in the Act.

Detailed information on Irish citizenship and naturalisation, as well as the relevant application form, is available on the INIS website at www.inis.gov.ie. The website also contains guidance on the completion of an application for naturalisation and an on-line naturalisation residency calculator which individuals may find of assistance in establishing if the statutory residency requirements are met.

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

Naturalisation Applications

221. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a person (details supplied) has now attained the required status to facilitate a valid application for naturalisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14810/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the processing of an application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy is under consideration and has not yet reached a conclusion. The records indicate that the person in question currently has permission to reside in the State until 22 February 2019.

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

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

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the INIS of my Department by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be

obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from the INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Naturalisation Applications

222. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a person (details supplied) is now eligible to make an application for naturalisation and long term residency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14811/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned is the subject of a Deportation Order, made on 11 March 2005, following a comprehensive and thorough examination of their asylum claim and a detailed examination of the representations they submitted for consideration under Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended).

The person concerned, through their legal representative, has made a request to have that Deportation Order revoked, based on the provisions of Section 3 (11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended). This request will be considered as soon as it is possible to do so. The Deputy might wish to note that the resulting decision will be to 'affirm' or to 'revoke' the existing Deportation Order.

I'm also advised that, separately, the person concerned, through their legal representative, has also sought to be re-admitted to the asylum/protection process and the initial decision in this regard is under review. Once a final decision has been arrived at, it will be notified in writing. The Deputy might wish to note that the resulting decision in this instance will be to give or refuse the person permission to apply again for international protection.

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

Family Reunification Applications

223. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if family reunification in the case of a person (details supplied) will be facilitated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14812/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person in question made an application for family reunification under the provisions of the Refugee Act 1996 in January 2015. The case has been finalised and a decision letter issued to the applicant on 6 November 2015. There is no record of any current application for family reunification from the person concerned.

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

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

Naturalisation Applications

224. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the naturalisation of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14813/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that there is no record of an application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy. A determination on whether an applicant satisfies the statutory criteria attendant to naturalisation can only be made after an application is received. I would, however, refer the Deputy to my response to his Parliamentary Question No. 97 of 6 March in relation to the person concerned.

It is open to any individual to lodge an application for a certificate of naturalisation if and when they are in a position to meet the statutory requirements as prescribed in the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended, which governs the granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation.

Detailed information on Irish citizenship and naturalisation, as well as the relevant application form, is available on the INIS website at www.inis.gov.ie. The website also contains guidance on the completion of an application for naturalisation and an on-line naturalisation residency calculator which individuals may find of assistance in establishing if the statutory residency requirements are met.

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

Residency Permits

225. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when stamp 4 will be updated for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14814/18]

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

I wish to advise the Deputy, therefore, that the Residence Division of INIS does not currently have any application for the person concerned before them. In this regard, and to allow a full examination of their circumstances, the person concerned should be advised to write di-

rectly to EU Treaty Rights Unit, Residence Division, Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service, 13-14 Burgh Quay, Dublin 2. At that time, they should provide such biographical detail as would allow the INIS to identify them and should set out the details of their case. Information on application types, qualifying criteria, and required documentation are available on the INIS website. In the alternative, the Deputy may provide further identifying information in respect of the person concerned in order that the INIS may furnish him with a more comprehensive response.

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

Residency Permits

226. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when an application by a person (details supplied) for long-term residency stamp 4 will be progressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14818/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned is the subject of a Deportation Order signed on 25 August 2017. This Order requires the person concerned to remove themselves from the State and remain outside the State. The enforcement of the Deportation Order is a matter for the Garda National Immigration Bureau.

Representations were received on behalf of the person concerned requesting that the deportation order be revoked, pursuant to the provisions of section 3(11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended). All relevant aspects of the case will be considered before a decision is made.

The Deputy might wish to note that the decision to ensue from the consideration of this request will be to have the existing deportation order 'affirmed' or 'revoked'. Once such a decision has been made, this decision will be notified in writing. In the meantime, the deportation order remains valid and in place.

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

Naturalisation Applications

227. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the procedure to be followed to conclude an application for naturalisation by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14819/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that an application for a cer-

tificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy has entered the final stage of processing. A letter issued to the person concerned on 8 August 2017 requesting him to submit the prescribed certificate fee and other documents. No reply has been received to date. A reminder letter issued on 9 March 2018. I am informed by my officials that the required information relating to his passport is already on file and the applicant is not required to resubmit his passport.

As the Deputy can appreciate, no further processing of the application can take place pending receipt of a response to our letter dated 09 March 2018.

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

Data Protection

228. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on data harvesting; the steps he is taking to ensure the practice is regulated and not open to abuse; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14895/18]

229. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reasoning behind adopting a digital age of consent below the EU recommendation; if it will be reconsidered in view of the abuse of data harvesting that has come to light in recent days; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14896/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 228 and 229 together.

The position is that section 2 of the Data Protection Act 1988 specifies that personal data shall be obtained only for one or more specified, explicit and legitimate purposes and shall not be further processed in a manner incompatible with that purposes or those purposes. For any such further processing (including disclosure, sharing or otherwise making the data available) to be lawful, a legal basis, such as the consent of the individuals to whom the data relate, is required. This 'purpose limitation' principle is also set out in Article 5.1(b) of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which will enter into force across the EU on 25 May. It means that an appropriate legal basis will continue to be required for the purposes of such further processing.

While supervision and enforcement of data protection law in the State, including the handling of complaints, is currently a matter for the Data Protection Commissioner, Part 2 of the Data Protection Bill 2018, which yesterday completed its passage through the Seanad, provides for establishment of a Data Protection Commission to supervise and enforce the strengthened data subject rights in the GDPR. The Commissioner performs her statutory tasks and exercises her powers in an independent manner; the same will apply to the Commission following its establishment.

Following entry into force of the GDPR, the Commission will be responsible for administering a broad range of sanctions in cases in which the data protection standards of the GDPR have been breached. These include the possible imposition of administrative fines of up to €10 million or €20 million (or 2% or 4% of total worldwide annual turnover in the preceding finan-

cial year). I am confident that establishment of the Data Protection Commission, together with the availability of strengthened sanctions, will facilitate effective supervision and enforcement of the GDPR's enhanced data protection standards.

As regards the digital age of consent, the position is that while Article 8 of the GDPR provides for an age of 16 years, it clearly states that Member States may provide for a lower age but no lower than 13 years. The age of 16 years is not an EU recommendation, but rather the upper age limit and Member States have adopted different approaches to implementing this provision.

In order to assist the Government in making its decision on the digital age of consent to apply in this jurisdiction both my Department and the Government's Data Forum – which brings together legal and data protection experts, business representatives from SMEs and multinationals, as well as sociologists, psychologists and education specialists – carried out public consultation processes. Following the completion of these consultation processes, the Government opted for a digital age of consent of 13 years. When making this decision, the Government took account of the expertise and knowledge of those that responded to these consultation processes in reaching this decision. A majority of respondents – including, notably, the Ombudsman for Children's Office, the Internet Safety Advisory Committee and the Children's Rights Alliance – recommended a 'digital age of consent' of 13 years.

Moreover, when appearing before the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice and Equality for the pre-legislative scrutiny of the General Scheme of the Data Protection Bill last July, Special Rapporteur on Child Protection, Dr Geoffrey Shannon, also recommended setting the 'digital age of consent' at 13 years. This recommendation was adopted by the Joint Committee in their report published in November last.

I should add, finally, that a number of other Member States, including Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Czech Republic, Latvia, Poland, UK and Spain, have also adopted a digital age of consent of 13 years.

Garda Reports

230. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 294 of 23 January 2018, 90 and 95 of 25 January 2018, and 223 of 20 February 2018, when the promised reports from An Garda Síochána will be issued; the reason for the delay in the issuing of these reports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14898/18]

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

Departmental Reviews

231. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he has been provided with a copy of the findings of the counsel led review of his Department; the steps he will take on foot of this report; if he plans to publish this report; the timeframe in which he will do so; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14899/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The report of the Independent Review of the response of the Department of Justice and Equality to requests for docu-

ments from the Disclosures Tribunal was published by the Taoiseach earlier this week.

I want to again thank Michael Collins SC for undertaking this task, and for the comprehensive, efficient and professional way in which he carried out his review.

I welcome Mr. Collins's central conclusion that there was no attempt by the Department of Justice and Equality to conceal information from the Tribunal in any way and that my predecessor and Department officials acted at all times in good faith and believed that they were acting reasonably in the manner in which they conducted searches for documentation. Mr. Collins also stated that he found no evidence of any failure to comply with Orders from the Tribunal.

I am of course concerned that emails of potential relevance to the Tribunal's considerations were not located as part of the Department's discovery process. My Department is putting new measures in place that are aimed at ensuring that an oversight of this kind could not happen in future. These plans are referred to and endorsed by Mr. Collins in his report. These new measures include the use of specialist IT consultants, where needed, for discovery and the establishment of a separate unit to interact with Tribunals and Commissions. There is a Civil-service wide initiative underway in relation to electronic file management and this will help to ensure that electronic documents, including emails, can more easily be associated with relevant files.

My full statement on the matter can be found on my Department's website, www.justice.ie.

Small and Medium Enterprises Supports

232. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the additional in-market supports now available to Irish small and medium enterprises, SMEs, to prepare for or mitigate the impact of Brexit which were not available 12 months ago; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14710/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation is central to the Government wide effort to prepare Irish SMEs and our wider business ecosystem for Brexit. Steps already taken include Budget 2018 (and 2017), our Trade and Investment Strategy published in March 2017 and through the Action Plan for Jobs 2017 and 2018.

"Building Stronger Business" sets out work underway, and planned, by DBEI and its Agencies in response to Brexit, including supports available to companies, inclusive of SMEs, to help them prepare for Brexit. It also describes our research programme designed to inform that response.

The following is a list of supports available to Irish SMEs to help alleviate the impact of Brexit on their businesses:

€300m Brexit Loan Scheme

In March 2018, the Government launched a new Brexit Loan Scheme for eligible businesses with up to 499 employees. Loan amounts range from €25,000 up to €1.5m, for terms of up to 3 years and a maximum interest rate of 4%.

SME Scorecard Online Tool

Any business can quickly self-diagnose whether they are ready for Brexit. This Enterprise Ireland (EI) scorecard is a first step in developing a robust Brexit plan. It will help to stimulate thinking about the key areas that may be impacted in your business and to self-assess your level

of preparedness. www.prepareforbrexit.ie

Awareness Sessions & Advisory Clinics

There are a range of awareness sessions and Advisory Clinics being convened by EI, Inter-Trade Ireland (ITI) and the LEOs to provide information and support to companies all around the country on actions to address exposure to Brexit. The key focus of advisory clinics are Financial and Currency Management, Strategic Sourcing and Customs, Transport and Logistics.

Be Prepared Grant

For businesses that need external support in planning for Brexit, Enterprise Ireland offers up to €5,000 to assist client companies develop a plan.

EI Market Discovery Fund

Diversifying to new markets is one option for many businesses in preparing for Brexit. EI supports businesses to research viable and sustainable new market entry strategies.

Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs)

Brexit supports from LEOs in every county include:

LEO Brexit Mentor Programme: supporting Owner/Managers identify key Brexit exposures and develop robust strategies to address issues and maximise potential opportunities.

Technical Assistance for Micro-Exporters (TAME): Financial assistance to support market diversification in qualifying businesses to develop new and export market opportunities.

Lean for Micro: helping businesses adopt LEAN business practices to increase competitiveness.

LEO Innovation and Investment Fund (LIIF): Support for innovative developments in micro-enterprises by getting them investor ready.

InterTradeIreland (ITI) Brexit ‘Start to Plan’ Vouchers

ITI provides a Brexit Advisory Service to help businesses with practical advice, support and information on Brexit related issues. ITI also provides vouchers to enable companies to get professional advice on Brexit, including likely tariffs, currency management, regulatory and customs issues and movement of labour, goods and services.

FDI Brexit Supports

IDA Ireland offers support to client companies as they grow and diversify their Irish footprint. The IDA offers practical assistance, such as information and advice on Brexit risks and opportunities, and financial assistance across R&D, training, employment and capital investment.

Health and Safety Authority (HSA)

The HSA’s Chemicals Helpdesk provides a support service for Irish chemical companies and SMEs on meeting legislative duties and ensuring they can source chemicals and sell in the EU.

Certification, Standards and Metrology

The National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) provides advice on how best to ensure

businesses are certified to appropriate standards to access markets.

A number of Brexit alleviation supports are also available from Government Agencies outside of my Department that are involved in specific business sectors:

Tourism and Hospitality

Fáilte Ireland offers a suite of supports for hospitality and tourism businesses, including an online Brexit Readiness Check, to assess Brexit risks and to respond to current challenges.

Bord Bia Brexit Barometer

Bord Bia's Brexit Barometer is designed to help businesses assess their readiness for Brexit and also provides information on supply chain, currency, customs and international market diversification opportunities.

My Department is leading on a range of Brexit research projects, which will provide an extensive evidence base and valuable analysis to inform and guide Ireland's position within the EU-27. The Department's actions are set out in more detail in the publication Building Stronger Business: Responding to Brexit.

Departmental Staff Training

233. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the amount that her Department has spent on social media training and consultancy in each year since 2016. [14561/18]

234. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if training has been delivered in her Department on the use of social media (details supplied); the frequency and cost of this training; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14577/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 233 and 234 together.

Earlier this year two members of my Department's Communications and Press Unit attended a one day training course on mobile journalism, which was run by the Department of An Taoiseach. The course covered: an overview of mobile content production; photography presentations and practical exercises; and video recording/production presentations and practical exercises. There were associated costs to my Department in the purchase of mobile phone apps in advance of the course, totalling €73.80.

In addition, since 2016 eight members of staff have attended social media conferences at a total cost of €2,055.50. The conferences provided an insight into how social media can be used effectively to communicate with stakeholders and customers through the application of best practice and latest trends from industry experts. The following table provides a breakdown on the frequency and cost.

There has been no expenditure on Social Media Consulting.

Social Media training in each year since 2016.

Year	No. of Conferences	No. of Staff trained	Cost
2016	2	5	€1274.35
2017	1	1	€ 276.75

Year	No. of Conferences	No. of Staff trained	Cost
2018	1	2	€ 504.40
Total			€2055.50

Enterprise Ireland Data

235. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of Enterprise Ireland clients in Dublin and by county; the number in Dublin city, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, Fingal and south County Dublin; the number in Cork city and County Cork in each of the years 2014 to 2017, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14608/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): On 3rd January 2018, Enterprise Ireland (EI) announced its 2017 end year results. The 2017 performance was strong, reporting the highest employment in the history of the agency, the highest net job creation in the history of the agency and the lowest number of job losses since 1998.

In 2017 EI supported client companies employed 209,338 people. 19,332 new jobs were created by EI backed companies in 2017.

This represents a net increase of 10,309 jobs for 2017, taking account of job losses. The job creation figures are up on 2016, despite the uncertainty that Irish businesses faced in 2017 in the context of Brexit.

Job creation was evenly spread across the country, with every county seeing job increases. Two thirds (64%) of the new jobs created were outside of Dublin. The West, Mid-West and North West saw the largest level of increases at 7% in 2017.

Table 1 presents the number of EI clients on a county basis. **Table 2** presents the number of EI clients in each of the four Dublin boroughs.

Table 1: Number of EI client companies on a county basis

County	2014	2015	2016	2017
Carlow	84	85	85	82
Cavan	80	78	79	78
Clare	146	139	143	131
Cork	598	599	580	568
Donegal	144	142	139	125
Dublin	2,081	2,073	2,104	2,197
Galway	253	246	257	257
Kerry	119	117	114	127
Kildare	182	174	182	192
Kilkenny	108	111	114	116
Laois	55	56	54	55
Leitrim	35	33	29	25
Limerick	242	240	245	250
Longford	46	45	49	50

County	2014	2015	2016	2017
Louth	159	156	156	154
Mayo	113	110	114	115
Meath	159	164	169	170
Monaghan	107	107	106	104
Offaly	70	67	67	69
Roscommon	53	51	53	51
Sligo	76	69	69	69
Tipperary	118	122	117	123
Waterford	134	135	138	143
Westmeath	103	100	99	114
Wexford	123	123	123	122
Wicklow	165	163	166	161
Total	5,553	5,505	5,551	5,648

Source: Corresponding Year's Annual Employment survey results 2014-2017

Table 2: Number of EI client companies in Dublin by Borough

Dublin Boroughs	2014	2015	2016	2017
Dublin City	1,087	1,089	1,109	1,174
Dublin Fingal	278	282	281	289
Dublin South County	322	336	350	370
Dun Laoghaire - Rathdown	391	366	364	364
Dublin	2,081 (2,078*)	2,073	2,104	2,197

2017 was the first year of EI's strategy, *Build Scale, Expand Reach 2017 – 2020*.

This Strategy is focused on:

- Assisting clients to create 60,000 new jobs by 2020 while sustaining the existing record level of jobs;
- Growing the annual exports of client companies by €5bn to €26bn per annum;
- Increasing the level of spend made by client companies in the Irish economy by €4bn to €27bn per annum by 2020; and
- Inspiring more Irish owned companies to have global ambition.

I am committed to work closely with Enterprise Ireland to drive this Strategy, to ensure that it continues to support companies in urban and rural areas to start, innovate, increase our exports and remain competitive in international markets, now and into the future.

Note: re: 2014 Dublin Borough Breakdown. Please note that Enterprise Ireland's database records the current number of clients. Therefore, a retrospective breakdown of clients (e.g. for a specific year is not possible with the system and the required data can only be provided for those years for which the data was extracted and saved at that time). Enterprise Ireland broke the Dublin Borough data down in this manner in 2015, 2016 and 2017. However, the 2014 data was not saved using this format (i.e. with City & borough breakdowns). Using 2015 records Enterprise Ireland is able to provide the breakdown by borough for 2,078 of the 2,081 plants recorded in Dublin in 2014. Between 2014 and 2015 three companies previously located in Dublin relocated to Meath (2) and Waterford(1).

Retrospective data broken down by Cork City & County is not available - as per above please note that Enterprise Ireland's database records the current number of clients and their current location (i.e. as of 27th March 2018). Therefore, a retrospective breakdown of clients and where they were located in a given year, is not possible with the system and the required data can only be provided where the data was extracted and saved at that time.

Job Creation Data

236. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of jobs created in 2017 by companies that received financial support from the local enterprise offices by county; the number in Dublin city, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, Fingal and south County Dublin; the number in Cork city and County Cork in 2017, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14609/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) are the 'first-stop-shop' for providing advice and guidance, financial assistance and 'soft' supports in the form of training and mentoring to anyone wishing to start or grow a business.

The LEOs provide a 'signposting' service in relation to all relevant state supports available through agencies such as Revenue, the Department of Social Protection, Education and Training Boards, the Credit Review Office and Microfinance Ireland. The LEOs also offer advice and guidance in areas such as local authority rates, public procurement and other regulations affecting business.

Details of the number of new full- and part-time jobs created in gross terms amongst LEO supported companies in 2017 are set out in the following table.

LEO NAME	Number of LEO Clients	Number of Gross Jobs
Carlow	216	187
Cavan	206	207
Clare	224	251
Cork City	156	128
Cork North & West	261	154
Cork South	203	209
Donegal	200	255
Dublin City	397	445
Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown	256	338
Fingal	211	226
South Dublin	285	351
Galway County/City	254	192
Kerry	425	267
Kildare	171	282
Kilkenny	254	232
Laois	115	93
Leitrim	155	104
Limerick	299	279
Longford	243	177
Louth	235	200
Mayo	207	242

LEO NAME	Number of LEO Clients	Number of Gross Jobs
Meath	242	284
Monaghan	152	207
Offaly	196	193
Roscommon	167	131
Sligo	231	152
Tipperary	297	467
Waterford	319	182
WestMeath	265	300
Wexford	213	238
Wicklow	127	162
Total	7182	7135

Local Enterprise Offices Data

237. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the investment by local enterprise offices in client companies by local authority area in 2015, 2016 and 2017, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14610/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) are the ‘first-stop-shop’ for providing advice and guidance, financial assistance and ‘soft’ supports in the form of training and mentoring to anyone wishing to start or grow a business.

The LEOs can offer direct grant aid to microenterprises (10 employees or fewer) in the manufacturing and internationally traded services sectors which, over time, have the potential to develop into strong export entities. Subject to certain eligibility criteria, the LEOs can provide financial assistance within three main categories: Feasibility Grants (investigating the potential of a business idea); Priming Grants (to part-fund a start-up); and Business Development Grants for existing businesses that want to expand.

Details of investment by LEOs to client companies under the above schemes from 2015 to 2017 are shown in the table below. [Note – The LEOs can also provide ‘soft’ supports e.g. training, mentoring, advice etc. to business operators.]

LEO Payments 2015 – 2017

LEO	2015 Payments	2016 Payments	2017 Payments
Carlow	195,636	193,753	294,363
Cavan	303,796	215,046	295,299
Clare	351,182	404,676	605,230
Cork City	199,041	292,056	335,810
Cork North/West	298,678	535,495	347,738
Cork South	425,156	491,247	311,484
Donegal	233,088	393,798	458,896
Dublin City	602,065	788,647	665,324
DLR	390,449	506,909	488,954
Fingal	698,616	549,190	461,301
South Dublin	375,977	334,996	443,311
Galway	223,870	393,686	433,596

LEO	2015 Payments	2016 Payments	2017 Payments
Kerry	285,394	299,856	284,498
Kildare	214,422	355,485	456,436
Kilkenny	243,868	313,638	346,981
Laois	244,659	254,909	178,970
Leitrim	213,628	130,325	166,140
Limerick	725,223	683,676	482,436
Longford	182,677	194,467	147,150
Louth	195,023	227,426	209,493
Mayo	279,505	416,782	117,921
Meath	166,085	177,278	307,349
Monaghan	208,518	374,863	387,597
Offaly	292,979	210,161	316,825
Roscommon	225,659	125,498	263,112
Sligo	170,702	387,160	247,074
Tipperary	686,295	720,627	659,341
Waterford	396,950	496,233	388,802
WestMeath	321,587	457,135	292,230
Wexford	303,780	285,151	220,012
Wicklow	393,945	207,261	308,334
Total	10,048,453	11,417,429	10,922,007

Consultancy Contracts Data

238. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the value of contracts for services awarded to a company (details supplied) by her Department since 2010, in tabular form; and the type of work undertaken by the company. [14622/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department had one contract with the company in question in the specified time period.

The services of the company in question were used by the HR Unit of my Department in 2017, following their success in a public procurement mini-competition for the provision of specified External Workplace Investigative Services. The total value of services provided during 2017 was €17,492.56 including VAT at 23%.

Film Industry

239. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the impact of the sale of a studio (details supplied); the impact on the State's position in relation to the studios; the impact on employees; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14706/18]

240. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if she has met with representatives of a studio (details supplied) in 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14707/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I pro-

pose to take Questions Nos. 239 and 240 together.

Olcott Entertainment Limited (Olcott) has completed the acquisition of Ireland's leading film studios, Ardmore Studios Ltd (Ardmore Studios/Ardmore) located in Bray, Co. Wicklow. Under the deal, Olcott has acquired the full share capital of Ardmore Studios International. Prior to the sale of Ardmore Studios, it was owned 68.33% by private interests and 31.67% by the State. The State's shareholding is managed by Enterprise Ireland.

Enterprise Ireland inherited the stake from NADCORP, the former State investment agency, in 1986. As a passive investor, Enterprise Ireland had no enterprise development role in Ardmore or any involvement in its day-to-day operations.

The sale of the Ardmore Studios was a commercial decision by the majority owners of the studios.

Wicklow County Council has in the past confirmed to my Department that it agrees to maintain the film-only zoning as a matter of policy.

Enterprise Ireland negotiated the sale of its shareholding with the benefit of due diligence undertaken by independent consultants and are satisfied that they realised full market value, and on a par with the other parties. As the sale is a commercial transaction relating to a private company, the terms cannot be revealed for reasons of business confidentiality.

Investment is required in the Ardmore studios' facilities to secure its long term commercial future and the Olcott Entertainment deal provides the potential to breathe new life into the company at a time when the market for film production in Ireland is again showing good growth potential.

I therefore welcome the Olcott plans to develop and expand the Ardmore Studio offering, and other related entertainment projects which I believe is in the best commercial interests of the studios, the skilled workers in the area, and in Ireland as a location for international film production. Olcott also intends to retain the current experienced Ardmore management and staff.

I have not met with representatives of the purchasers. However, Enterprise Ireland has remained engaged with the company and their representatives at all stages of this process. Any proposals requiring a decision were reviewed by the Agency in consultation with me, as Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation. In turn, I have consulted with the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

Insurance Coverage

241. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of businesses choosing not to take out employer and or public liability insurance by the latest data available; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14836/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department has no role or function in relation to business insurance namely, employer or public liability insurance. Apart from motor insurance which is the policy responsibility for the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, policy responsibility for insurance is a matter for the Minister for Finance and is regulated by the Central Bank.

My Department does not have any data on the number of businesses choosing not to take out employer or public liability insurance.

Farm Safety

242. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the actions and deadline agreed following the first meeting of the farm safety taskforce in tabular form; and the number of meetings the taskforce has planned in 2018. [14852/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): In view of the ongoing high rate of accidents and fatalities on Irish farms in May 2017 I convened a Roundtable Meeting of the main farming representative organisations along with officials from my Department, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the Health and Safety Authority. I co-chaired that meeting with my colleague the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Michael Creed TD.

Following that meeting a range of suggestions and proposals were received from the farming and agricultural sector organisations on how farm safety might be improved. As some of these suggestions relate to the policy areas of other Government Departments and State Agencies I have set up a Farm Safety Task Force to see how these suggestions can be progressed where possible.

The inaugural meeting of Farm Safety Task Force took place on Tuesday 13th March 2018.

The members of the Task Force have undertaken to carry out a comprehensive review of the suggestions, specific to their respective Departmental and Agency policy areas, with a view to identifying and developing viable and workable action points.

I have asked the Members to report back to me within a few weeks with a view to reconvening the Task Force shortly afterwards to conduct a more detailed analysis of potential actions and the way forward.

It would be premature of me to comment further on the matter at this stage as I do not wish to pre-empt the deliberations of the individual Task Force members by commenting on any potential actions that might yet be undertaken.

Legislative Programme

243. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the status of the Consumer Rights Bill; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14901/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): While I am anxious to progress the Scheme of the Consumer Rights Bill published by my Department in May 2015, I have to take account of current European Union legislative proposals for Directives on consumer contracts for the supply of digital content and consumer contracts for the online and other distance sale of goods. These proposals which were announced in May 2015 and published in December 2015 overlap very substantially with two of the main parts of the draft Scheme of the Consumer Rights Bill. In this situation, I and my predecessors have had to consider the advisability of bringing forward a legislative proposal to the Oireachtas when directly related and fully harmonised legislative proposals were progressing through the European Union legislative process. The wisdom of introducing legislation in the Oireachtas if large parts of that legislation would have to be repealed or substantially amended within a relatively short space of time is obviously open to question.

A general approach was agreed on the proposed Digital Content Directive at the Justice and Home Affairs Council in June 2017. The proposal is now the subject of trilogues between the

European Parliament, Council and Commission and is likely to be adopted later this year. Four trilogues have been held to date and a fifth meeting is scheduled to take place on 26 April. An amended proposal for a Directive covering all consumer contracts for the sales of goods was published on 31 October 2017. To date, there have been six meetings on the proposal at working party level and a first reading is close to completion. On 22 February 2018, the Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee adopted a report on the proposed Directive and agreed a mandate to enter into inter-institutional negotiations on it. I would hope that agreement on a general approach on the proposed Directive can be reached this year. When both Directives have been adopted, my Department will commence work on the necessary changes to the Scheme of the Consumer Rights Bill with a view to bringing a memorandum to Government on the Bill at the earliest possible date.

IDA Ireland

244. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of meetings her Department officials and advisers have had with the IDA regarding an IDA sponsored opinion piece (details supplied); the number of such opinion pieces by her and her predecessors in regional and national newspapers in each of the years 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018 that a State agency under her remit sponsored; and the costs to date. [14907/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): IDA Ireland's "Local Impact" initiative forms part of the Agency's normal marketing activity and is aimed at promoting regional foreign investment by showcasing the availability of property, talent and regional capabilities across the country.

Since November 2017, IDA Ireland and the Irish Times have worked together on the initiative to create content with clients and stakeholders in regional locations. These stakeholders come from regions across Ireland and include the Mid-West, Border and Midlands areas.

Individual locations that have been highlighted through IDA Ireland's work on this campaign include FDI activity in Drogheda, Co.Louth; Raheen, Co.Limerick; Shannon, Co.Clare; Letterkenny, Co.Donegal, Nenagh, Co.Tipperary; Westport, Co.Mayo.

The overall commercial international marketing package negotiated with the Irish Times included:

- A physical supplement in the Irish Times;
- Creation of all content, images and graphics;
- All of the research and interviews conducted with companies throughout Ireland;
- 90,000 distributed hard copies of the supplement;
- A dedicated microsite live for two months aimed at domestic and international audiences;
- All promotion including three print ads and digital promotion that is ongoing.

Two more premium articles and a video will also follow, which were created and produced by the Irish Times. This package was achieved for €70,000 - the advertising rate card value was significantly higher.

IDA Ireland has had no specific meetings with my Department regarding the sponsored opinion piece which featured in the Irish Times supplement. IDA Ireland requested that I would

be interviewed for this supplement as the relevant office holder in order to give a Ministerial perspective on regional jobs growth in Ireland.

No other State Agency under my Department's remit has sponsored opinion pieces in the period referenced.

Brexit Issues

245. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her views on the findings of the research commissioned by the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission, CCPC, (details supplied); the steps she is taking to protect consumers from increased costs due to Brexit; and if the action plan for jobs 2018 and the revised Enterprise 2025 strategy has a specific section indicating the actions the Government will take to protect customers in this regard. [14909/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department is central to the Government wide effort underway for almost two years now to respond to the implications of the UK decision to leave the EU. These efforts include extensive contingency planning at a domestic level and influencing the EU approach to the negotiations with the UK. In order to provide an evidence base to inform our approach to our domestic response, and to the negotiations, my Department has led and/or been involved in a broad range of research and analysis. One such study was that commissioned from the ESRI by the Competition and Consumer Protection Commissions (CCPC): this study was designed to provide us with evidence of the potential impacts of particular Brexit scenarios on consumers in Ireland.

The research examined two Brexit scenarios on a "no policy change" basis. The first, where there is a trade deal and tariffs are avoided, but where there still could be significant non-tariff barriers such as costs arising from additional time spent at customs, or due to changes in labelling rules and other regulatory standards. The second, a "harder" scenario with the imposition of World Trade Organisation tariffs in addition to non-tariff barriers.

Depending on the scenario, the analysis finds an increase in the cost of living of between €892 and €1,360 per year for the average household. The increases would be unevenly distributed across households, with lower income households most affected by price rises.

The CCPC has brought the report's findings to the attention of the relevant enterprise agencies (and other stakeholders) with a view to their consideration of potential future actions. However, it is important to recall that the actual impact will depend not only on the eventual Brexit deal reached, but also on the level of domestic competition, the availability of alternatives to particular products and consumers' responses to changes in prices.

Government has, of course, already put a whole host of policy and operational measures in place to respond to Brexit including supporting and encouraging companies, including retailers, to plan for Brexit now. A key tool which is available to all companies is the SME Brexit Scorecard which is online and free to access. It is a diagnostic tool which points to areas companies could consider in starting to prepare a Brexit plan. These include operational issues like reviewing sourcing, supply chains, transport and logistics more generally as well as more strategic issues such as lean initiatives, diversification and investing in innovation.

Supporting companies to prepare for Brexit can also ultimately help to protect consumers from possible negative impacts of Brexit as companies make alternative sourcing arrangements to underpin security of supply and cut costs to keep prices for consumers down. The CCPC study points to some opportunities presented by Brexit for domestic business particularly in the

area of import substitution. Although the study points to the potential for considerable increased costs arising for consumers as well as the possibility of reduced product choice, it also points to the fact that actions by business and consumer behaviour can help mitigate the actual impact which will also be dependent on the level of domestic competition in various sectors, the availability of alternatives and the willingness of consumers to move away from certain products.

In relation to the Action Plan for Jobs 2018 and Enterprise 2025, neither contain specific consumer related actions as they are primarily focused on job creation and improving the business environment.

One of the most effective mitigation actions we can take in responding to Brexit is to negotiate the closest possible future relationship between the EU and the UK. The Government has been seized of that since the negotiations started and will continue to remain central in shaping the EU approach to the negotiations with the UK with a view to getting the best deal, minimising risks and maximising opportunities associated with Brexit.

Research and Development Data

246. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if she will provide an overview of the revised research priority areas in each of the years 2018 to 2023; the details of each revised action committed to in tabular form; the deadline for this action to be completed; and the budget funding to be made available to priority areas. [14911/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Innovation 2020, Ireland's strategy for research and development, science and technology, committed to refreshing and revising the priority areas which were introduced under Research Prioritisation in 2012 to ensure that they are still valid in light of changed circumstances.

A rigorous exercise including extensive consultation was undertaken to develop the evidence base to inform the refresh exercise. While the evidence demonstrated that for many of the priority areas, the focus remains as relevant in 2018 as it was for the 2012 -2017 cycle, there have been several revisions and updates to both the themes and the priority areas to reflect changing circumstances in that period.

- The ICT priority areas have been broadened to reflect the changes in technology since 2012 and now include Robotics, Artificial Intelligence (including Machine Learning), Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality.

- With the focus on preventive health measures and the increasing emphasis on well-being, which is evident across all the health-related priority areas, the Health theme has been evolved to reflect these drivers and is renamed Health and Well-being.

- The Sustainable Food Production and Processing priority area is broadened to reflect the evolution in technology since 2012 and the key emerging priorities in the EU initiative Food 2030, particularly the need for climate smart and environmentally sustainable food systems and the need for circularity and resources efficiency of food systems and is renamed Smart and Sustainable Food Production and Processing.

- The most significant changes have been to the Energy theme. Based on developments since 2012, including the increased urgency to address climate change and sustainability challenges, alongside the increased opportunities for enterprise within this wider context, the Research Priority theme has evolved to reflect these drivers and is renamed Energy, Climate Action and Sustainability, and the two priority areas have been updated to Decarbonising the Energy Sys-

tem; and Sustainable Living.

- To reflect the impact of technological change and the digitisation of manufacturing since 2012, the Manufacturing Competitiveness priority area is renamed Advanced and Smart Manufacturing (which will also include Processing Technologies) and Processing Technologies and Novel Materials is renamed Manufacturing and Novel Materials, acknowledging that Novel Materials underpin and enable other priority areas, presenting particular challenges for the manufacturing sector.

- The services sector in Ireland is a major part of Ireland's economy and is increasingly participating in innovative activities and the Innovation in Services and Business Processes research priority remains unchanged.

The revised priority areas are as follows:

Theme	Priority Area
ICT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Future Networks, Communications and Internet of Things - Data Analytics, Management, Security, Privacy, Robotics and Artificial Intelligence (including Machine Learning) - Digital Platforms, Content and Applications, and Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality
Health and Wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Connected Health and Independent Living-Medical Devices - Diagnostics- Therapeutics
Food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Food for Health - Smart and Sustainable Food Production and Processing
Energy, Climate Action and Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Decarbonising and Energy System - Sustainable Living
Manufacturing and Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Advanced and Smart Manufacturing - Manufacturing and Novel Materials
Services and Business Processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Innovation in Services and Business Processes

These priority areas will apply for the years 2018 to 2023. While there are no specific actions prescribed to each of the priority areas, the Government's policy is to align the majority of competitively awarded public investment in research with these areas.

Implementation will be driven through the Innovation 2020 Implementation Group, which is chaired by my Department and comprises membership from each of the research funding Departments and Agencies and the Chief Scientific Adviser.

The revised priority areas will be of particular relevance in the context of the new €500 million Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund announced by the Government as part of the National Development Plan 2018-2027.

Brexit Issues

247. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the reason the Government and her predecessor did not support the proposal submitted by the CEO of Enterprise Ireland prior to budget 2018 to reinstate an enterprise stabilisation fund as was

done during the financial crisis to provide direct supports to vulnerable but viable businesses as a Brexit business mitigation measure in view of confirmation (details supplied). [14912/18]

248. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her views on the analysis by the CEO of Enterprise Ireland to her predecessor that the Brexit loan scheme may not meet the needs of all Enterprise Ireland client companies; the steps she has taken to adapt the loan scheme in view of confirmation (details supplied); and when the loan scheme will be launched. [14913/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 247 and 248 together.

The €300 million Brexit Loan Scheme was launched yesterday, and aims to mitigate the effects of Brexit on exposed and vulnerable companies. It will be available to businesses who employ less than 500 staff. Businesses will be able to borrow monies to support and fund their Brexit stabilisation strategies and growth plans.

My Department worked very closely with Enterprise Ireland (EI) during the development of this scheme to ensure that it would adequately meet the needs of its client companies, although the scheme is also open to non-EI companies. EI has welcomed the Brexit Loan Scheme and will work with its client companies to help them to avail of the finance available.

While the Brexit Loan Scheme is an extremely important aspect of my Department's Brexit strategy, it is not the only action that we are taking. EI provides a suite of supports to enable companies to prepare for Brexit. These include, but are not limited to, the Brexit Scorecard, the Be Prepared Grant, the Market Discovery Fund and the Brexit Advisory Clinics.

Yet another measure to mitigate against the effects of Brexit, is the Rescue and Restructuring (R&R) Scheme which was approved by the EU Commission in late November 2017. This scheme has been put in place as it is considered prudent to have contingency measures in place so that we can respond swiftly to changing circumstances as necessary.

In addition, my Department more widely is taking steps to address other mitigating measures, such as examining current State Aid legislation. In November 2017, the then Tánaiste met with Commissioner Vestager (who has responsibility for EU State aid policy). An outcome from this meeting was the establishment of a Working Group comprising representatives from DG Competition, the Department of Business, Enterprise & Innovation, Enterprise Ireland and Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. The objective of the Group is to scope and design schemes to support enterprises impacted by Brexit in line with State Aid rules. Should issues arise that require an approach that does not fit within the existing State Aid rules, this will be raised as part of the Working Group discussions.

My Department is also examining proposals for a new longer-term Business Investment Loan Scheme to support businesses to invest strategically in response to Brexit. The scheme will apply to SMEs, small mid caps and innovative mid caps and will operate within existing State Aid rules.

We will continue to monitor the challenges faced by businesses, and continue to develop robust policies to help combat them. I feel confident, however, that our Brexit Loan Scheme will provide Brexit exposed companies with the necessary capital to develop strong stability and growth strategies to enable them to not only combat challenges, but to avail of the opportunities that Brexit presents.

Small and Medium Enterprises

249. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her views on a proposal by an organisation (details supplied). [14914/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): As Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, I have a deep focus on indigenous enterprises in Ireland. My Department is also keen to review relevant policy and to work towards a new SME policy fit for SMEs in the modern era. Earlier this month, I met with Secretary General of the OECD, Angel Gurría, here in Dublin, to launch the upcoming collaboration of DBEI and the wider Government with the OECD on the Review of SME and Entrepreneurship issues and policies in Ireland.

This will be a seminal 18-month project which will see a comprehensive review of the SME business ecosystem and policies, using OECD expertise in a structured and defined process. The resulting recommendations and issues identified by the report will then form the basis of a long term DBEI led SME Strategy for Ireland. Areas covered include taxation, the regulatory environment, productivity challenges and skills and human resource management. It also includes an assessment of the main SME-targeted programme areas, including SME workforce and management skills, internationalisation, financing and innovation. Specific attention will focus on productivity through innovation and digitalisation in SMEs, the ability for Irish SMEs to scale and to internationalise and how SMEs can increase high quality labour retention.

In relation to a wider industrial policy, Enterprise 2025 Renewed was launched on 9th March 2018. The review of our policies was undertaken in light of significant global challenges that include Brexit, international developments in taxation, new policies under US administration and the relentless pace of change driven by advances in technologies. The Review reaffirms our commitment to export-led growth, underpinned by innovation and talent. Enterprise 2025 highlights the need to place a greater emphasis on supporting the establishment and scaling of Irish owned enterprises- a significant proportion of which are SMEs.

Enterprise 2025

250. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her views on an analysis by an organisation (details supplied). [14915/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Enterprise and job creation in the State is influenced by many aspects of Government policy – the national and international economic climate, the domestic business environment, including the regulatory regime, the taxation regime, competition policy, access to business finance, the availability of skills in the economy and so forth.

My Department advocates in favour of pro-business policies across all these areas in order to encourage the start-up and development of businesses across the entire spectrum of the business population in the State.

More immediately, the annual Action Plan for Jobs is a series of initiatives, across Government Departments and Agencies designed to support business and job creation from all sources.

Enterprise 2025, which was recently revised and published by my Department, is a longer term strategy to ensure that we continue to build resilient enterprises that can compete in the face of the various international economic challenges.

My Department is also currently leading on a Country Review of entrepreneurship and SME policies being developed in conjunction with the OECD. This eighteen-month project will review the entire SME business ecosystem and provide key recommendations that will provide the structure with which this Government can push forward into the future with a coherent and inclusive SME Strategy. Through this Review and subsequent Strategy, I, and my Department, will further increase our efforts to support SMEs, especially indigenous enterprises, and create the most vibrant ecosystem for businesses.

In terms of indigenous companies, my Department's agencies are primarily focussed on directly supporting start-ups and existing businesses that can scale and compete internationally.

Enterprise Ireland supports companies in urban and rural areas to start, innovate and remain competitive in international markets, now and into the future. At the centre of the agency's strategy, Build Scale, Expand Reach 2017 - 2020, are strategic targets focused on:

- Assisting clients to create 60,000 new jobs by 2020 while sustaining the existing record level of jobs;
- Growing the annual exports of client companies by €5bn to €26bn per annum;
- Increasing the level of spend made by client companies in the Irish economy by €4bn to €27bn per annum by 2020; and
- Inspiring more Irish owned companies to have global ambition

On an annual basis Enterprise Ireland works with approximately 5,000 companies through a network of market and sector advisers based across 10 national offices and 33 international offices. These manufacturing and internationally traded services companies are a critical source of existing employment and job creation in every county in Ireland.

However, many businesses are not involved in sectors or exporting that fall under the remit of EI. For those businesses, the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) are the 'first-stop-shop' for providing advice and guidance on business issues, including signposting to sources of support, available through agencies such as Revenue, the Department of Social Protection, Education and Training Boards, the Credit Review Office and Microfinance Ireland. The LEOs also offer advice and guidance in areas such as local authority rates, public procurement and other regulations affecting business.

This support is available to micro-businesses i.e. those businesses that employ less than 10 people which represent the vast majority of businesses in the State.

For eligible businesses, financial assistance and 'soft' supports in the form of training and mentoring may also be available through the LEOs.

LEO Highlights from 2017 show that -

- 7,135 new jobs (gross) and 3,760 jobs (net) created by LEO backed client companies, with jobs growth across every county
- 30,373 people participated in business training programmes
- 8,393 mentoring assignments were provided to small business owners to give guidance and advice around key business issues.
- 1,179 business projects received direct financial assistance.

Small and Medium Enterprises Supports

251. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her views on a proposal by an organisation (details supplied). [14919/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The provision of State supported hedging products, or similar products aimed at subsidising an exchange rate, is prohibited under EU State Aid rules. However, there are multiple financial providers active in the Irish market that can provide a comprehensive and competitive range of hedging and foreign exchange products to SMEs who require them.

Viable Irish SMEs can access sustainable, flexible and appropriately priced finance through the Credit Guarantee Scheme (CGS) currently operated by the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI). The SBCI uses an on-lending model; this means it does not lend directly to SMEs, rather it channels its funds through partner financial institutions, known as on-lenders. Since its establishment in 2012, 530 facilities have been sanctioned under the CGS, amounting to €84.4 million. As a result of the facilities sanctioned under the CGS to SME's, 2104 new jobs have been created and 1186 jobs have been maintained. The main reason provided by SME's for seeking finance was for working capital purposes which accounted for 67% of all CGS facilities.

The Microenterprise Loan Fund is also available through Microfinance Ireland (MFI). Since its inception in 2012, 3,441 applications have been received, with the value of loans approved to the end of 2017 amounting to €22.6 million. This facility has supported 3952 jobs (net) in 1,567 micro-enterprises.

As the Deputy will be aware, there are already significant Government measures to support the financing needs of SMEs; in addition to the supports mentioned, these supports include the Supporting SMEs Online Tool, Local Enterprise Offices, the Credit Review Office and the recently announced Brexit Loan Scheme.

Advisory supports in relation to business planning, such as those provided by the Local Enterprise Offices and Enterprise Ireland, are also particularly important in assisting viable but vulnerable SMEs that may be adversely affected because of Brexit and other challenges. These supports help raise awareness of both private market financial supports and existing State supports.

Personal Injury Claims

252. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the reason the Personal Injuries Commission has no consumer representatives other than Competition and Consumer Protection Commission officials. [14920/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The membership of the Personal Injuries Commission, chaired by Justice Nicholas Kearns, includes representatives from my Department, the Department of Justice and Equality, the Irish Hospital Consultants Association, the Bar Council, the Law Society, Insurance Ireland, the State Claims Agency as well as the Personal Injuries Assessment Board (PIAB) and the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC).

I am satisfied that the PIC membership, as outlined above, includes representation from consumer stakeholders, including the business community.

Personal Injury Claims

253. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the details of data (details supplied) in each of the years 2010 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form. [14921/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The following Table details the number of applications received by the Personal Injuries Assessment Board (PIAB) each year from 2010 to end February 2018 and the number of assessments accepted for that period. The remainder of cases are, either released by the issuing of an authorisation under section 14 (where the respondent does not consent to an assessment or liability may be an issue), or under section 17 (where the Board has discretion not to make an assessment in certain situations specified in the legislation) or under section 32 (where the claimant or respondent does not accept the assessment) or are cases that are not completed usually because they are settled during the PIAB process or withdrawn. There is no data available on cases settled directly between the parties outside of the Court and PIAB process. An authorisation by PIAB is necessary before a claimant can initiate proceedings in Court.

PIAB cases are dealt with speedily and at a low cost, the current delivery cost is approximately 6.5% of the value of the compensation and this is mainly comprised of the fees paid by the claimant and respondent and the costs of the medical reports required to assess the case. Comparable figures for litigation are not available. However, the Cost of Insurance Working Group Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance published by the then Minister for Finance in January 2017 estimated that the delivery costs for cases settled outside the PIAB model from data provided by a representative sample of Insurance Ireland members was 44.2% in 2015.

Table of Applications to PIAB, Accepted Awards and Delivery Costs on Accepted Awards

Year	Personal Injuries Applications to PIAB	Number of Accepted Awards	Delivery Costs on Accepted Awards %
2010	26,964	5,038	8.8
2011	27,669	5,875	8.8
2012	29,603	6,124	9.0
2013	31,311	6,476	7.5
2014	31,576	7,519	6.7
2015	33,561	6,716	6.5
2016	34,056	7,073	6.4
2017	33,114	6,788	6.2
2018 (to end February)	5,467	2,027	Available at year end

Source: PIAB Annual Reports.

Personal Injury Claims

254. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her views on amending the PIAB Acts to provide that a claimant who is found to have made deliberately unsustainable claims in the course of their PIAB claim shall not be entitled to an order for legal costs in a subsequent litigation. [14922/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Section 51 of the PIAB Acts provides that PIAB assessments shall not be admissible in any subsequent proceedings unless the proceedings concerned relate to the enforcement of any assessment that is being accepted.

There are a number of pieces of legislation that come under the remit of my colleague the Minister for Justice and Equality Charlie Flanagan T.D., to deal with exaggerated or fraudulent claims, namely the Civil Liability and Courts Act 2004 and the Criminal Justice (Theft and Fraud Offences) Act 2001.

I have no plans to amend the PIAB Acts in this regard.

Personal Injury Claims

255. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her views on a revised book of quantum whereby modest injuries attract modest damages, while more severe injuries receive damages of a level appropriate to the injury and loss of earnings suffered; her further views on the UK system of care not cash for minor bodily injuries. [14923/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Personal Injuries Assessment Board (PIAB) is an independent statutory agency and I, as Minister, am not permitted in my executive function to interfere in any way with the day to day operations and functions of PIAB.

Section 54 of the Personal Injuries Assessment Board Act 2003 sets out the principal functions of the Board. Section 54(1)(b) states: ‘to prepare and publish a document (which shall be known as the “Book of Quantum”) containing general guidelines as to the amounts that may be awarded or assessed in respect of specified types of injury’

The revised Book of Quantum was published in October 2016. The Book was compiled by independent consultants and commissioned by the Personal Injuries Assessment Board (PIAB).

The Book is not a recommendation for compensation levels but rather a reflection of the prevailing level of awards, i.e.:

- compensation values awarded by the courts
- settlements agreed by the Insurance Industry
- settlements agreed by the State Claims Agency; and
- settlements agreed through the PIAB process.

The establishment of the Personal Injuries Commission was one of the key recommendations in the Cost of Insurance Working Group Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance published in January 2017 by the then Minister for Finance, Mr Michael Noonan T.D., and the then Minister of State for Financial Services, Mr Eoghan Murphy T.D. The Report sets out the terms of reference for the Personal Injuries Commission. The Commission as part of its second Report has been asked to report on care not cash models. It is anticipated that this Report will be published in Q2 of 2018.

256. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if the EU Council Directive 2013/59/EURATOM legislation will exclude physiotherapists from a list of health professionals entitled to refer individuals for X-rays; if so, the rationale for same; his plans to revise the list of health professions entitled to refer persons for x-rays (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14505/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): EU Council Directive 2013/59/Euratom defines referrer with certain roles and responsibilities attaching to same. Member States are required to designate health professionals as referrers as appropriate.

The statutory instrument transposing the Directive will designate those who may refer for radiological tests and in this regard I propose to designate nurses, doctors, dentists and radiographers as appropriate. Physiotherapists are not designated as referrers in the current regulations (S.I. 478/2002) and it is not proposed to designate them in the new regulations.

In November 2017, I launched Working Together for Health: A National Strategic Framework for Health and Social Care Workforce Planning. Underpinned by a core set of principles, the framework is intended to support the recruitment and retention of the right mix of health workers across the health system to meet planned and projected service need. Implementing the framework will be a multi-annual undertaking and it is envisaged that, in due course, matters relating to health and social care professionals, including scope of practice, will be considered and addressed through the framework structures currently being established.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Review

257. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the plans in place to introduce an independent appeals mechanism within nursing homes support scheme to provide third party recourse for nursing home providers that cannot agree a fee with the National Treatment Purchase Fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14514/18]

258. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health when the review of pricing system for long-term residential care facilities will be published as recommended within the review of the fair deal scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14515/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 257 and 258 together.

The Report of 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 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.

Hospital Appointments Status

259. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment in the National Rehabilitation Hospital, Dún Laoghaire, County Dublin. [14518/18]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities

260. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) has to wait to get an appointment with the Cavan-Monaghan child development team; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14519/18]

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.

Drug and Alcohol Task Forces

261. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health when the details of new funding initiatives to strengthen the capacity of drug task forces to support the implementation of Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery during 2018 will be announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14536/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): Drug and alcohol task forces play a key role in assessing the extent and nature of the drug problem and in initiating appropriate responses, so that there is a coordinated approach involving all sectors to the problem of substance misuse in local communities.

In excess of €27.6m has been allocated to task forces by the Department of Health and the Health Service Executive for community-based drugs initiatives this year. This level of funding is consistent with the amounts provided in 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017.

I will shortly be announcing details of new funding initiatives to strengthen the capacity of task forces to support the implementation of the national drugs strategy, Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery, during 2018.

I strongly believe that resources should be directed towards interventions that are most effective in reducing problem substance use. Measuring the effectiveness of responses to the drug problem is therefore an important objective of public policy. Towards this end, my Department will develop a performance measurement system by 2020 which will improve accountability across all sectors, including the task forces.

I will shortly be meeting with the chairs of the task forces to discuss this and other issues relating to the implementation of the national drugs strategy.

Vaccination Programme

262. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health his plans to increase advertising to inform parents that HSE school teams will be visiting second level schools from mid-March 2018 to offer girls the second dose of the HPV vaccine and provide another opportunity for girls who missed out on the vaccine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14537/18]

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.

Home Help Service Data

263. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the number of new persons to receive home support in each CHO area in 2018 in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14544/18]

264. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in receipt of home support in each CHO area as of March 2018; the corresponding number for March 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14545/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 263 and 264 together.

As these are service matters I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Home Help Service Data

265. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in each

CHO area who are on a waiting list for home support; the number of persons in each area waiting more than 2, 4, 8 and 12 weeks, respectively in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14546/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As these are service matters I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Hospital Appointments Status

266. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the status of the case of a person (detail supplied); and when they will receive an appointment with the Royal Victoria Eye and Ear Hospital, Dublin. [14549/18]

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.

Mental Health Services Staff

267. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the timeline to address staffing shortages in mental health services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14552/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The Government is committed to increasing the Mental Health budget annually, as shown by the substantial additional funding of some €200 million provided for mental health from 2012 to 2018.

Since 2012, over 1,550 additional posts have been approved to strengthen Community Mental Health Teams. These posts are directly facilitating the policy of moving away from traditional institutional based care to a patient-centred, flexible and community based mental health service.

I recognise that there are particular difficulties recruiting mental health staff at present and related workforce challenges. Psychiatry is a specialty where there are significant worldwide shortages and international competition for our doctors and nurses.

We have responded to the recruitment difficulties in a number of ways.

In Budget 2018, funding was provided for an additional 130 Undergraduate Psychiatric Nurse training places per year. This will help to increase the number of nurses in the mental

health system. In addition, we have provided funding for 114 Assistant Psychologist and 20 Psychologist posts in the Primary Care Mental Health Services. The HSE is currently in the process of recruiting these psychology posts. The introduction of this grade will help to alleviate some of the pressures in CAMHs.

Recruitment of nurses is a key priority this year. The HSE has committed to offering permanent contracts to all graduate nurses, including mental health nurses. These contracts are being offered as part of the 2017 Nursing and Midwifery Agreement, reached with the INMO and SIPTU. This Agreement has a particular focus on addressing recruitment and retention of nursing and midwifery posts. This Agreement followed an agreement with the Psychiatric Nurses Association and SIPTU in summer 2016 that also includes a range of measures aimed at improving psychiatric nursing staffing levels. Very extensive and detailed work was undertaken throughout 2017 and continues into 2018 to implement these Agreements.

The Public Service Pay Commission identified problems in recruitment and retention in specific and specialist groups that are internationally in demand particularly in the health sector. The Commission is currently undertaking a more comprehensive examination of underlying difficulties in recruitment and retention in those sectors and employment streams where difficulties are clearly evident, including psychiatry. The Commission is committed to reporting on medical and nursing grades mid-year. The outcome of its assessment will be subject to discussions between the relevant parties.

Departmental Staff Training

268. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health the amount that his Department has spent on social media training and consultancy in each year since 2016. [14570/18]

269. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health if training has been delivered in his Department on the use of social media (details supplied); the frequency and cost of this training; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14586/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 268 and 269 together.

The Department of Health has not provided any social media training to its staff during the period 2016 to date.

Ambulance Service Provision

270. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health the number of SUVs and the technical specification of each that were bought for use by HSE paramedics in counties Louth and Meath over the past five years; if these vehicles functioned fully in the recent snow events; and if the HSE paramedics sought assistance from an organisation (details supplied), the Civil Defence or other organisations to help transport paramedics. [14606/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service issue, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Medicinal Products

271. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if Melatonin will be added to the list of medicines covered by the medical card (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14614/18]

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

Health Insurance Levy

272. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if the levy on health insurance for elderly persons (details supplied) is a once off payment upon joining a scheme or is a yearly payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14616/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Lifetime Community Rating, which came into operation on 1 May 2015, is designed to encourage people to join the private health insurance market at younger ages. This supports affordable community-rated premiums for everyone who wishes to purchase health insurance. Since May 2015, 'late entry loadings' apply for those aged 35 and over who purchased health insurance for the first time. The loadings are set at 2% per year starting at age 35, up to a maximum loading of 70% at age 69 and over. These loadings are not a once-off payment and originally applied for each year that the customer held health insurance. The Health Insurance (Amendment) Act 2017 introduced a cap on loadings so that loadings now apply for a maximum period of 10 years. There are also exemptions available for people who previously had health insurance but cancelled it. In such cases, the level of loading will then be reduced by the relevant credited period(s). More information on this and other health insurance related matters are available on the Health Insurance Authority's website www.hia.ie.

Health Services Provision

273. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be taken into care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14617/18]

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.

Consultancy Contracts Data

274. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health the value of contracts for services awarded to a company (details supplied) by his Department since 2010, in tabular form; and the type of work undertaken by the company [14631/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The information requested by the Deputy is not immediately available and I will revert to the Deputy once the Department has collated the required information.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

275. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter regarding a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14643/18]

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

Medicinal Products

276. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health if a service will be provided to persons (details supplied). [14645/18]

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.

Hospital Appointments Status

277. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment will be rescheduled for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14646/18]

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.

Home Care Packages Provision

278. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the reason there has been a delay in organising a home care package for a person (details supplied); and the steps which will be taken to organise same in view of the fact that the person has been in hospital for seven weeks due to no home care package being available. [14680/18]

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 Facilities

279. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health if provision is made in the 2018 financial allocation to the HSE to progress the proposed upgrade of a health facility (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14696/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly.

Ambulance Service Data

280. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of ambulance attendances at each emergency department nationwide in February 2018; the number of such ambulances that waited longer than of 20 minutes to hand over patients, receive their trolleys back and return to responding to calls; and the number that waited longer than 40, 60, 90, 120 and 180 minutes for same, in tabular form. [14703/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service issue, I have asked the

HSE to respond to you directly.

Departmental Agencies Staff Remuneration

281. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the process which has been established regarding pay for section 39 organisations; if the interim report due at the end of March 2018 is completed. [14705/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): On 9 February 2018, an agreement was reached between my Department, the HSE and health sector Trade Unions in relation to a process aimed at resolving the pay restoration issue for staff employed by section 39 bodies. The HSE are to carry out an analysis to establish, with supporting evidence, the following:

- Whether, when and to what extent reductions in pay rates were applied during the crisis in each relevant organisation;

- Whether, when and to what extent restoration of pay reductions has happened;

- Identify the financial implications for each organisation, taking account of all sources of funding, associated with addressing the issues identified and propose an appropriate plan for phased resolution in each case.

The HSE has issued detailed questionnaires to an agreed list of organisations. The interim report, to which the question refers, is expected from the HSE shortly.

National Treatment Purchase Fund Data

282. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health his plans to decrease day cases across the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14766/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) publishes the Inpatient/Day Case and Outpatient waiting list figures on its website each month. The publication includes Inpatient and Day Case Adult and Child Analysis.

The most recent figures published by the NTPF for the end of February 2018 indicate that there is a total of 79,039 people on the Inpatient/Day case waiting list, of which 56,180 are waiting for a day case procedure. Of this figure, 59% are waiting 6 months or less, 15% are waiting 12 months or more.

October's Budget announced a total 2018 allocation of €55m for the NTPF for 2018. This significant increase in funding more than doubles the 2017 total allocation of €20m.

The Inpatient/Day Case Action Plan 2018, developed by the Department of Health, the HSE and the NTPF will be published shortly. The Plan will set out ambitious targets for both the HSE and NTPF to reduce the overall number of patients waiting for treatment.

Services for People with Disabilities

283. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the reduction of staff at a service (details supplied); if the HSE has identified the impact on services; if contingency plans have been put in place for the potential loss of staff; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [14772/18]

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.

Medical Card Applications

284. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when an emergency or discretionary medical card will issue in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14816/18]

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.

Medical Card Applications

285. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when a discretionary medical card will issue in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14817/18]

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.

However, there is insufficient information contained in the PQ for the HSE to investigate this issue. Therefore the Deputy should forward the requested information directly to the HSE.

Medical Card Applications

286. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when a medical card will issue for a person (details supplied) in view of the fact that their circumstances have not changed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14820/18]

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.

Medical Card Applications

287. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when a discretionary medical card will issue in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14821/18]

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.

Primary Care Services Provision

288. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health his plans to provide additional resources for primary care; if his attention has been drawn to the particular difficulties facing many general practitioner practices in areas such as counties Cavan and Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14882/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The development of primary care is central to the Government's objective to deliver a high-quality, integrated and cost-effective health care system. The Slaintecare Report also made significant recommendations in relation to shifting the model of healthcare towards a more comprehensive and accessible primary care service in order to deliver better care close to home in communities across the country.

The provision of a €25 million primary care development fund in Budget 2018 is evidence of this Government's continued investment in primary care. This funding has been allocated to enable a range of primary care initiatives to be progressed in 2018 which will focus on disease prevention and early intervention, particularly through the further development and expansion of GP services, community intervention teams and the recruitment of additional occupational therapy posts. Throughout 2018 there will also be a continued focus on the development of primary care centres and primary care teams.

General Practitioners play an important role in the primary care system. There is a clear need to modernise the GMS contract and ensure that general practice is a viable and rewarding career for medical graduates. The aim is to develop a contract with a population health focus, providing in particular for health promotion and disease prevention and for the structured ongoing care of chronic conditions.

A new contract must be flexible and be able to respond to the changing nature of the GP workforce. It must also include provisions in relation to service quality and standards, performance, accountability and transparency. This will be key in making general practice a more attractive career. I expect that engagement with GP representatives on contractual issues will commence in the coming weeks.

The Government is committed to increasing GP capacity to ensure that patients across the country continue to have access to GP services and that general practice is sustainable in all areas into the future. Efforts undertaken in recent years to increase the number of practising GPs include changes to the entry provisions to the GMS scheme to accommodate more flexible/shared GMS/GP contracts, and to the retirement provisions for GPs under the GMS scheme, allowing GPs to hold GMS contracts until their 72nd birthday, as well as the introduction of enhanced supports for rural GP practices.

The Government has taken steps to expand GP training. In 2009, there were 120 GP training places and this year there are over 190 GP training places available for the 2018 GP training intake. The Government is committed to further increasing this number to 259 places annually.

HSE Staff Data

289. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if the adequacy of the number

of solemnisers, the restrictive timing of ceremonies at which they officiate and the fact that they only provide this service from Monday to Friday will be addressed in view of the significant increase in public demand for civil marriage ceremonies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14894/18]

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

Coillte Teoranta

290. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the proposed sale of a wind farm (details supplied) in County Roscommon. [14554/18]

291. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the amenity development will continue to be maintained and overseen by Coillte in view of the proposed sale of a wind farm (details supplied) in County Roscommon. [14555/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 290 and 291 together.

Coillte was established as a private commercial company under the Forestry Act, 1988 and day-to-day operational matters, such as the commencement of a market process in relation to the possible sale of wind farm assets, are the responsibility of the company.

Coillte has, however, advised that it formally commenced a market engagement process last week to seek expressions of interest from potential investors to acquire up to half of Coillte's 50% stake in the Sliabh Bawn Wind Farm.

Coillte also advised that, in the event of a successful sale of half of its 50% share in Sliabh Bawn Wind Farm following the expression of interest stage, Coillte intend to retain the remaining 25% share in the overall project and a corresponding level of involvement in the management of the wind farm. Coillte add that it would therefore have a basis to ensure that the management of the amenity is maintained in line with the current standards of Sliabh Bawn Wind Farm DAC.

Climate Change Policy

292. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the consequence highlighted by an organisation (details supplied) if climate action, that is, environment protection is not undertaken; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14525/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, I am acutely aware of the importance of recent reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in relation to the challenges facing us all regarding mitigation of emissions and the need to ensure that we are resilient and can adapt to climate change. It is important that every sector plays its part given Ireland's very challenging 2020 and, provisionally agreed, 2030 targets. We must look to 2030 and beyond in formulating policies that will address the twin challenges of climate change and the global increase in demand for food. It is projected that there will be a 50% increase in global demand for food by as early as 2030. The IPCC 5th assessment report highlighted that globally, food sources will become unpredictable, as population booms.

Therefore, it is more important than ever that we continue to produce food, especially as our agri-food production system has been independently and internationally recognised as both climate and resource efficient. Our grass-fed, low carbon model of livestock production places us at an advantage versus other livestock producing nations and with the right approach to sustainable agri-food and the right mitigation techniques, we can approach our responsibilities to climate change in a very positive and effective way.

At national level we are taking a whole of Government approach to climate policy. Officials from my Department work very closely with other Departments and in particular, with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, which is the lead department in this area.

We have used this collaborative approach to make the most of opportunities such as actively following the IPCC in relation to the development of their Special Report on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security.

Ireland supported the concept of a Special Report by hosting a preliminary workshop in 2015 and subsequently Ireland along with Costa Rica, New Zealand and Tanzania sent a letter to the IPCC proposing that a Special Report on Climate Change, Food and Agriculture be undertaken. The IPCC formally considered this and other various proposals for special reports as part of the 6th assessment cycle which will culminate in a 6th assessment report in time for the first global stock take in 2023. Following difficult discussions the IPCC agreed to produce three Special Reports one of which is on land/agriculture issues (Climate change, desertification, land degradation, sustainable land management, food security, and greenhouse gas fluxes in terrestrial ecosystems’).

In 2017 Ireland again hosted the IPCC at which the terms of reference for the Special Report were agreed. This Special Report will be developed under the joint scientific leadership of Working Groups I, II and III supported by the WG III TSU (Technical Support Unit). Ireland will host the IPCC leader author meeting later this year with the Special Report expected to be completed in 2019.

GLAS Payments

293. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a GLAS payment for a person (details supplied); the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14533/18]

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 full payments in respect of the 2015 and 2016 scheme years.

The Department is aware of an issue with this case that resulted in the 2017 advance payment not being made. Department officials are currently identifying a solution to the issue and payment will be processed once this solution is implemented. GLAS 2017 advance payments began in November 2017 and are continuing to issue on a weekly basis.

Young Farmer Capital Investment Scheme Applications

294. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a young farmer capital investment scheme application by persons (details supplied);

and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14553/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The above named applied for grant aid under the Young Farmer's Capital Investment Scheme of TAMS II on 22 February 2018. This application was rejected on 26 March 2018 as applications from Joint Ventures are not allowed under the Young Farmers Capital Investment Scheme (except in the case where ALL members of venture are qualifying young farmers). In order for other joint ventures to be eligible for Young Farmers Capital Investment Scheme a Department Registered Farm Partnership must also be in place at date of application. It is open to the applicants to apply for grant aid under the other schemes of TAMS II, or to form a Registered Farm Partnership and reapply under the Young Farmer's Capital Investment Scheme.

Departmental Staff Training

295. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the amount that his Department has spent on social media training and consultancy in each year since 2016. [14560/18]

296. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if training has been delivered in his Department on the use of social media (details supplied); the frequency and cost of this training; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14576/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 295 and 296 together.

My Department's social media presence is managed by the Press and Information Office of my Department. Since 2011, staff members from the Press and Information Office and I.T. sections have attended 3 training courses on the use of social media, at a total cost of €475. Separate to these courses, a member of my Department's staff attended Social Media Dublin 2017, a conference on the topic of social media, in January 2017, and 3 staff members attended the same conference in 2018. Total expenditure by my Department for attendance at these events was approximately €1,000.

GLAS Payments

297. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a repayment to farmers (details supplied) in County Mayo will issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14611/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The persons named were approved into GLAS 2 with a contract commencement date of January 1st 2016 and have received all payments in respect of 2016 and the 2017 advance payment.

Administrative checks involving a number of sections within the Department take place on all GLAS claims. An over-declaration was identified in this case which resulted in a penalty being applied. The persons named were notified by letter and provided with the option to request a review. No such request was received by the Department.

GLAS Payments

298. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a GLAS payment for a person (details supplied) in County Mayo. [14612/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved into GLAS 3 with a contract commencement date of 1 January 2017.

Administrative checks involving a number of sections within the Department take place on all GLAS claims. All cases must clear validation checks before payment can issue. Department officials are working proactively to complete the checks in this case and once this case clears validations the 2017 advance payment will be made. GLAS payments are being made on a weekly basis.

Departmental Contracts Data

299. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the value of contracts for services awarded to a company (details supplied) by his Department since 2010, in tabular form; and the type of work undertaken by the company. [14621/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department had no contracts with the company named in the PQ during the years 2010 to 2014 and in 2018 to date.

In the years 2015, 2016 and 2017 the company in question was awarded contracts for services carried out on behalf of the Department. Details, as requested by the Deputy, are provided in the attached table.

2015

Nature of work undertaken by the Company	Value of Contract for services awarded to company€
Workplace Investigation	1,542

2016

Nature of work undertaken by the Company	Value of Contract for services awarded to company€
Workplace Investigations	18,839

2017

Nature of work undertaken by the Company	Value of Contract for services awarded to company€
Workplace Investigation	6,073

Knowledge Transfer Programme

300. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a knowledge transfer payment for a person (details supplied) will be reviewed; if payment will be processed in view of the circumstances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14684/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Knowledge Transfer (KT) is one of a suite of measures included under the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 and involves formation and administration of KT groups across the beef, dairy, equine, sheep, tillage and poultry sectors.

The person named is a participant of the KT Beef Programme and as outlined he attended

four of the five meetings held by the Facilitator of his group. However, in order to comply with the requirements of Year 1 of the Programme, it was also open for farmers to attend an approved KT National Event such as a farm walk in lieu of one of the required five meetings. There were approximately 180 of such events last year throughout the country with approximately 80 of these approved for the KT Beef Programme. These events have proved very useful for farmers in KT Groups to date.

As the person named did not avail of the option to attend a KT National Event and did not attend a fifth meeting of his KT Group he is due a reduced payment in respect of his participation under the programme. This reduced payment will, as required under the governing EU Regulation, issue via his KT Facilitator shortly.

GLAS Data

301. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of the original 10,000 farmers who were deemed ineligible for 85% advance GLAS 2017 payments due to the requirement for an applicant to get maps redigitised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14688/18]

302. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of GLAS applicants who were required to get maps redigitised to become eligible for payments in each of the years 2015 to 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14689/18]

303. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of land parcels that had to be redigitised in each of the years 2015 to 2017 to become eligible for GLAS payments in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14690/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 301 to 303, inclusive, together.

The Land Parcel Identification System (LPIS) stores the land parcel details for all Department area based schemes. The information stored is used for BPS, ANC, GLAS, Organics and Forestry Schemes.

GLAS payments are made based on the land parcels that are claimed by the GLAS applicant in the annual BPS application. Parcels are re-digitised for a number of reasons including changes submitted by the Herd Owner on the annual BPS application, Department Ground and Remote Sensing inspections and reviews when new imagery is received. It is an EU requirement that all changes to land are recorded on the LPIS database and any ineligible land identified is recorded.

My Department does not hold the specific data requested. It should be noted that in the majority of cases where reconciliation of the data on the BPS application is required the issue is in relation to crop codes and not in relation to redigitisation of maps. These cases are identified in the validation process and my Department contacts the individuals affected to resolve the issue.

Land Parcel Identification System

304. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason redigitisation was required, other than in cases in which land parcel identifier

numbers on GLAS maps did not correlate with parcels on BPS maps in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14691/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Land Parcel Identification System (LPIS) underpins a range of area based schemes which are administered by my Department. In keeping with EU Regulations, the LPIS must be regularly maintained and kept up to date and accurate. The digitisation process is the means by which required changes to land parcel details are updated on the LPIS to ensure its continued accuracy.

The main reasons why digitisation would be required are

- Where a farmer submits an update to his maps with his BPS application form
- Where the Department is updating land details on foot of inspections
- Where the Department is updating land details on foot of new ortho-photography which is received on an ongoing basis, and
- General ongoing maintenance of the LPIS data.

Land Parcel Identification System

305. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the mapping systems used for GLAS and BPS applications are clashing or proving to be incompatible with each other; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14692/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The same mapping system is used for both BPS and GLAS to ensure compatibility.

The Land Parcel Identification System (LPIS) stores the land parcel details for all Department area based schemes. The information stored is used for BPS, ANC, GLAS, Organics and Forestry Schemes. GLAS payments are made based on the Land Parcels that are claimed by the GLAS applicant in the annual BPS application.

It is an EU requirement that all changes to land are recorded on the LPIS database and any ineligible land identified is recorded. As changes are recorded on the LPIS database, this may have a knock-on effect for any area based schemes.

GLAS Administration

306. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the detail of the information technology problems being experienced by his Department and for which his Department has indicated to many farmers as the reason GLAS payments have been delayed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14693/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In the context of the Rural Development Programme 2014 - 2020 my Department has delivered over twenty new schemes that were supported by IT capability. In the first two years of the current RDP programme my Department has already implemented substantially more RDP schemes than were implemented over the entire ten year lifetime of the previous RDP programme.

This rate of delivery and draw-down would not have been possible without the availability of high quality complex IT software systems to support the business units in operating these

schemes. Since 2014 my Department has adopted a policy of implementing fully digital end-to-end support for all but the smallest of schemes.

My Department has an excellent record in the delivery of high quality ICT systems. We have been consistently among the first to make payments in the EU.

Currently 97% of eligible participants have received their 2017 advance payments. My Department will continue to process payments on a weekly basis for any participant that passes validations.

Agriculture Scheme Administration

307. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the amount being spent per annum by his Department on information technology systems for both GLAS and BPS; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14694/18]

308. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the same companies have the contracts to supply information technology support for both GLAS and BPS; if not, if this is contributing to delays in GLAS payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14695/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 307 and 308 together.

The Department's schemes and services are supported by a wide range of complex interconnected IT systems. These systems are developed and supported using an appropriate mix of internal ICT staff supported by external resources.

The external support for each of the systems in question was sourced through separate procurement exercises, in order to meet the particular development requirements of the individual systems. In respect of BPS and GLAS, the same contracting company was successful in being awarded both contracts. The awarding of these contracts had no negative effect on GLAS payments.

Details of the amounts paid in respect of contracts for external support in relation to the

- systems supporting the Basic Payment Scheme, Greening, Entitlements, National Reserve, Protein Aid Scheme, Young Farmers Scheme and maintenance of the Geospatial Information/Land Parcel Identification System (Column A below)

and the

- Generic Claims Processing System supporting the GLAS scheme, TAMS II, Organic Farmers Scheme, the various KT schemes and GLAS Training (Column B below)

are as follows:

Year	A	B
2015	€2,853,660	€2,594,945
2016	€3,514,460	€3,300,640
2017*	€3,694,812	€3,087,563

Costs are associated with the contracts in place and are not associated with individual schemes.

* Includes software testing contract costs which are paid under a separate contract for the testing of all Departments systems since May 2017.

Rights of Way Provision

309. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when an adequate right of way will be granted by Coillte to persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14807/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Coillte was established as a private commercial company under the Forestry Act, 1988 and day-to-day operational matters, such as the management of their lands, are the responsibility of the company.

The company has, however, confirmed that the request for a right of way, to which the Deputy refers, is currently going through Coillte's internal approval procedures and that the Coillte operational team expect to contact the persons requesting the right of way over the coming weeks with the intention of reaching an agreement.

GLAS Data

310. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons in receipt of GLAS 1, 2 and 3 who have received the 85% advance payment of their 2017 payment, by county in tabular form; the number of persons that have passed all payment approval checks and are awaiting the 85% portion of the 2017 payment; the number of GLAS recipients that have yet to receive this portion of payment by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14837/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information requested by the deputy is in the following table.

Payments continue to issue on a weekly basis as cases clear all validations.

County	GLAS 1		GLAS 2		GLAS 3		TOTAL	
	Advance paid	Adv not paid	Advance paid	Adv not paid	Advance paid	Adv not paid	Advance paid	Adv not paid
Carlow	260	12	114	10	124	3	498	25
Cavan	871	30	400	28	522	13	1,793	71
Clare	1,526	73	650	31	781	26	2,957	130
Cork	2,034	87	927	62	885	48	3,846	197
Donegal	1,833	86	934	57	1,346	61	4,113	204
Dublin	54	4	17	0	18	1	89	5
Galway	2,851	186	1,181	102	1,521	57	5,553	345
Kerry	1,664	90	809	56	719	41	3,192	187
Kildare	220	21	62	14	101	13	383	48
Kilkenny	407	17	192	15	175	16	774	48
Laois	351	16	182	8	217	14	750	38
Leitrim	980	31	394	25	508	16	1,882	72
Limerick	1,004	36	273	23	393	7	1,670	66
Longford	496	13	326	14	320	8	1,142	35
Louth	132	15	69	8	92	2	293	25
Mayo	2,325	205	1,185	132	1,572	82	5,082	419

	GLAS 1		GLAS 2		GLAS 3		TOTAL	
County	Advance paid	Adv not paid	Advance paid	Adv not paid	Advance paid	Adv not paid	Advance paid	Adv not paid
Meath	402	16	189	6	234	15	825	37
Monaghan	549	21	139	3	332	3	1,020	27
Offaly	449	25	252	22	280	13	981	60
Roscommon	1,461	53	509	39	692	20	2,662	112
Sligo	881	50	339	23	478	13	1,698	86
Tipperary	1,063	53	466	24	478	14	2,007	91
Waterford	318	35	110	20	109	12	537	67
Westmeath	619	20	248	10	267	12	1,134	42
Wexford	693	54	231	30	280	27	1,204	111
Wicklow	306	18	141	10	191	8	638	36
TOTAL	23,749	1,267	10,339	772	12,635	545	46,723	2,584

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Data

311. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons in receipt of AEOS payments that have received the 85% advance payment of their 2017 payment, by county, in tabular form; the number of persons that have passed all payment approval checks and are awaiting the 85% portion of the 2017 payment; the number of AEOS recipients that have yet to receive this portion of payment by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14838/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The following table outlines the current position. The number to be finalised of 497 includes 430 cases where participants have already transformed to GLAS but may be due payment on capital investments for 2017 under their AEOS contract. These cases must be examined to verify that all AEOS scheme payments were correctly made before the final 2017 AEOS payment can be released. Payments are continuing to issue as cases are finalised.

County	Numbers paid for 2017	Numbers to be finalised for 2017
Carlow	8	3
Cavan	71	10
Clare	118	17
Cork	84	54
Donegal	291	83
Dublin	3	1
Galway	346	48
Kerry	157	44
Kildare	5	2
Kilkenny	19	5
Laois	17	1
Leitrim	151	16
Limerick	52	9
Longford	18	5
Louth	12	3
Mayo	318	92
Meath	22	1
Monaghan	46	8

County	Numbers paid for 2017	Numbers to be finalised for 2017
Offaly	21	10
Roscommon	127	40
Sligo	83	18
Tipperary	34	12
Waterford	17	7
Westmeath	29	1
Wexford	10	3
Wicklow	12	4
Total	2071	497

Agriculture Scheme Data

312. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 238 of 15 February 2018, if all the data requested been compiled. [14839/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): For Pillar 1, my Department does not have an allocation of funding per se from the National Vote. Rather, national ceilings are set out in the relevant EU Regulations, and the Department manages the expenditure on all Pillar 1 schemes with reference to these ceilings. The relevant ceilings as set out in the EU Regulations are as follows:

-	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Ceiling	€1,216m	€1,215m	€1,214m	€1,212m	€1,212m	€1,211m	€1,211m

In managing Pillar 1 expenditure with reference to these ceilings, regular reports are compiled and submitted to the EU Commission. This reporting then underpins the drawdown of EU funds to match Pillar 1 expenditure already undertaken. Expenditure figures are collated in a number of different ways in order to fulfil the regulatory reporting requirements – for example, scheme year expenditure is tracked along with expenditure in a given calendar year. Across these levels of expenditure tracking there are also set EU rules for how expenditure is counted against the ceilings – for example, expenditure in respect of a given scheme year which is paid out in a different calendar year may in certain circumstances be required to be reported against both the calendar and scheme year ceiling.

Bearing these regulatory reporting requirements in mind, the following table sets out the number of farmers and the amount paid out to date in respect of each scheme year:

-	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Payments to farmers	€1,170m	€1,194m	€1,188m	€1,168m	N/A	N/A	N/A
Number paid	121,985	126,923	124,517	123,073	N/A	N/A	N/A

These figures represent the amounts paid out under BPS, the Young Farmer Scheme, the National Reserve, Greening, and the Protein Aid Scheme. The figures are net of penalties and overpayments which may apply in certain circumstances.

In order to manage expenditure with reference to the ceilings, there are a number of other factors to be also taken into account. For example, in respect of the 2014 figure modulation is not included in these figures.

Also, the figures in respect of the reimbursement of the Financial Discipline are not included in the above table. Each year, a proportion of the Pillar 1 funds is withheld centrally at EU level to cater for any events which may give rise to the need to allocate money from the “Crisis Reserve” fund which this withheld money creates. If this reserve is not utilised, it is redistributed to individual Member States at a later date. For example, in June 2017 my Department made payments totalling €13.6m to 96,000 farmers who were eligible under the 2016 BPS. This money had previously been withheld at EU level from the 2015 BPS payments under the Financial Discipline rules. The payment of this Financial Discipline across scheme and calendar years also has to be taken into account in managing the expenditure with reference to the national ceilings.

For each annual ceiling, there will also be cases that fall to be paid outside the bulk of the payment runs made in the October to December period in each year. For example, particularly protracted legal cases, cases where errors remain to be rectified, and appeal cases will fall to be paid in later years. These cases also require to be taken into account in the management of the ceilings.

Livestock Issues

313. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 551 and 553 of 14 December 2017, if all the data requested been compiled. [14840/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information requested by the Deputy is as follows. The livestock unit data in each case is based on cattle and sheep data held by my Department.

Table 1 - Livestock units per hectare and BPS value per hectare

Range of average BPS value per hectare - €	Livestock Unit per hectare
0-100	0.75
100-200	1.20
200-300	1.60
300-400	1.78
400-500	1.70
500-600	1.71
600-700	1.62
700-800	1.50
800-900	1.27
900-1000	1.28
>1000	1.18

Table 2 - Livestock units per hectare and category of land (ANC scheme)

ANC category	Livestock unit per hectare
Island	0.50
Less Severe	1.40
More Severe	1.11
Mountain land	0.47
Non ANC	1.31

Rural Development Programme

314. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a review of the rural development programme, RDP, targets, both participation and expenditure levels, committed to originally has commenced in view of the passing of the motion supporting the suckler sector on 21 February 2018 in Dáil Éireann; if so, if the two month deadline for the review to be completed will be met; and if not, the reason therefor. [14841/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The implementation of the Rural Development Programme is reviewed on an on-going basis to ensure that EU objectives are met and that all EU funding is fully drawn down. The latest review, just completed, confirms that the entire budget of some €4 billion is fully committed and expected to be spent and therefore no new schemes under the RDP can be considered at this time.

Rural Development Programme Funding

315. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the financial allocations on an annual basis under the 2014-2020 RDP for schemes (details supplied) in tabular form; the annual amount expended on these schemes in each year since established; the number of active participants in the schemes; and the number of applicants that have withdrawn from same. [14842/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the tables:

Table 1 – Voted Allocations for Schemes 2014-2018, Expenditure 2014-2017

-	Knowledge Transfer Scheme	GLAS	Beef Data and Genomics Programme	TAMS II	Sheep Welfare Scheme	Hen Harrier Programme
Allocation 2015	0	20,000,000	35,000,000	0	0	0
Expenditure 2015	0	11,452,500	34,692,000	0	0	0
Allocation 2016	0	139,500,000	52,000,000	28,000,000	0	0
Expenditure 2016	0	102,615,247	61,800,000	3,971,000	0	0
Allocation 2017	22,821,000	228,500,000	49,000,000	49,832,000	17,000,000	3,000,000
Expenditure 2017	13,784,000	195,583,187	47,137,000	31,256,000	15,851,000	717,000
Allocation 2018	23,000,000	203,000,000	49,500,000	69,943,000	20,000,000	3,500,000

The above are the total allocations and expenditure for the schemes. In a few cases, small parts of the allocation and expenditure for schemes are not co-funded.

Table 2 – No. of participants and withdrawals

-	Knowledge Transfer Scheme	GLAS	Beef Data and Genomics Programme	TAMS II	Sheep Welfare Scheme	Hen Harrier Programme
Number of active participants	19,100	49,404	24,788	12,849	20,845	366
Number of applicants that have withdrawn	260	2,193	5,909	300	340	0

GLAS Data

316. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the average annual payment per person under the green low carbon agri-environment scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14843/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The average annual GLAS payment is €4,155 and the average annual GLAS+ payment is €1,450.

TAMS Funding

317. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if TAMS II funds can be carried forward; and if not, if they must be returned to the Exchequer or the EU budget in view of the fact that the first TAMS II approvals that are now starting to lapse as the time for applying for payment has expired. [14844/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The TAMS budget for the duration of the RDP (2014-2020) is €395m. Payment claims continue to be received and processed on an ongoing basis, as is the case with applications for approval. The number of TAMS II outstanding approvals is currently 9,500. The usage of the budget is dependent on the volume and value of payment claims submitted by approved participants as they complete their approved works and the expenditure is monitored closely.

I would encourage all farmers who have an approval in place to undertake their planned investments and to submit a payment claim as soon as the approved work is completed. The budget of €395m is in place for that purpose.

As regards the contribution of national and EU funding for RDP schemes, all expenditure on schemes is nationally funded in the first instance and the co funded amounts are then claimed in arrears from the EU. Exchequer funds are allocated on an annual basis with estimated annual requirements taking account of commitments expected to mature within that period and within overall budget constraints. Public Financial Procedures provide scope to carry-over up to 10% of a Department's total capital allocation from one year to the following year. Any unspent EAFRD funds in a year are carried forward to subsequent years and the overall amount of €2.19 billion EAFRD funding for the entire period is not affected.

Farm Safety

318. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if other rural development programme, RDP, schemes operated in other member states (details supplied) that have significantly reduced farm fatalities have been examined with a view

for consideration for rollout here. [14845/18]

319. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the input by his Department into the first meeting of farm safety taskforce; and the actions agreed. [14851/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 318 and 319 together.

Farm safety is a critical issue facing our industry. Over the last ten years 210 people have been killed on Irish farms. 23 of these were children and 74 were elderly people. Accidents on farms cause more workplace deaths than all other occupations combined. Last year there were 24 fatal accidents on farms accounting for over 50% of all workplace fatalities.

Sadly there have already been 4 fatal farm accidents this year. Each of these deaths is a tragedy and we must work together to reduce deaths and accidents on our farms. Every single farmer must make time and take responsibility for safety on their farm to ensure they and their families and employees are working in as safe an environment as possible.

The Farm Safety Interdepartmental Task Force was set up to focus on this important area and my Department is a participant. My Department highlighted its on-going efforts under Ireland's current Rural Development Programme, including:

- A Farm Safety Scheme that was opened as part of the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Schemes (TAMS II) round of on-farm investment schemes.

- As part of all the TAMS II strands, it is mandatory to have completed a minimum of a ½ day farm safety course on completing the Code of Practice within the last five years.

- 'Health and Safety' guidelines are included in all 'Building Specifications,' drawn up by my Department for the construction of agricultural buildings and structures. The guidelines give advice on best practice and legislation.

- A mandatory Health and Safety element is included in all Knowledge Transfer (KT) Groups under the 2014-2020 RDP. All KT Groups held a meeting on the theme of farm health and safety in Year One of the Programme. Farmer participants also complete, for each of the three years of the Programme, a tailored Farm Improvement Plan with their approved KT Facilitator which includes a component related to farm health and safety. In addition to attending group meetings farmers have the option to attend an approved Knowledge Transfer National Event such as a farm walk in lieu of two meetings. Since the commencement of the Programme 11 of these events have addressed the topic of farm health and safety.

In addition, training on farm health and safety was delivered to approximately 300 KT Facilitators under the Continuous Professional Development measure.

The group is reviewing stakeholder submissions and considering further opportunities for interventions in what is a critical challenge for the industry.

With regards to the future of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) post 2020, the recent public consultation process organised by my Department allowed for views and possible approaches to be discussed and coincided with an invitation to make written submissions on the future of the CAP. Any measure that can reduce farm fatality rates will be given utmost consideration when finalising Ireland's position during future discussions of the CAP post 2020.

Fisheries Protection

320. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the recent publication by the European Commission on its multi-annual plan for fish stocks in the western waters which are located within the Atlantic Ocean. [14853/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The EU Commission published on 23 March 2018 a proposal establishing a multiannual plan for fish stocks in the Western Waters and adjacent waters, and for fisheries exploiting those stocks. The proposal covers whitefish and nephrops stocks on which much of our polyvalent segment of the fleet is strongly dependent.

I have asked our stakeholders for initial comments and I will be seeking detailed views over the coming weeks and months as the proposal is negotiated within the Internal Fisheries Working Group. The proposal will be formally presented at the next EU Fisheries Council on 16 April.

The EU Commission set down the main elements of the proposal:

- Simplifying fisheries management under one main regulatory framework, including existing plans;
- while fully respecting the 2020 objective of Fmsy (maximum sustainable yield) the plan will allow a certain flexibility in setting the fishing opportunities, where such a flexibility is needed in order to manage for example mixed fisheries. This flexibility, known as ‘ranges of Fmsy’, is proposed as the management method for the most commercially important demersal stocks - the target stocks;
- Following the precautionary approach for bycatch stocks, taking into account mixed fisheries;
- Allowing provisions for the landing obligation and technical conservation measures to be put forward by the North Western Waters Advisory Council and the North Western Waters MS Group for the fisheries that concern them most.

Agriculture Schemes

321. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to introduce a reclamation and drainage scheme; the status of the A Programme for A Partnership Government commitment to include a measure on clearing drains in the farm safety scheme under TAMS; and the timeline for implementation of same. [14854/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The budget for the Targeted Agriculture Modernisation scheme (TAMS) of €395m under the Development programme is fully committed at this stage. It is not possible to include additional investment items within the available budget. Support for land drainage is not included as an eligible item in the current programme.

Forestry Management

322. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he and the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht have examined with forestry and

farming groups the idea of introducing a forestry management protocol covering special protection areas important to the hen harrier which will allow an annual quota of new plantings in the areas involved. [14857/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I understand that the draft Hen Harrier Threat Response Plan is nearing completion and is currently being refined by the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht in consultation with Departmental stakeholders. I also understand that the draft will shortly be circulated to the Consultative Committee (which includes representatives from across the relevant sectors, including the forestry sector) with a view to publication for public consultation after Easter.

My Department and the forestry sector representatives submitted separate proposals earlier in the process, relating to the management of the existing forest estate and the potential for compatible afforestation. These proposals, along with those from other sectors and stakeholders, have been considered, and the soon-to-be-released draft will create the basis for the next stage of the Threat Response Plan's development.

Dairy Sector

323. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the latest EU auction on skimmed milk powder; the tonnes to date of skimmed milk powder intervention product purchased; the way in which the tendering process for intervention in 2018 is proceeding; and if the EU Commission is still offering €1,698 per ton as obligated under the 2013 CMO regulation in 2018. [14859/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As the Deputy will be aware, the Irish dairy market, following on from broader EU and international trends, is currently in a much improved position compared to the relatively recent past. Of course, we remain vigilant in monitoring the market and emerging trends, particularly as we approach the peak period for Irish milk production.

The issue of intervention stocks overhanging the dairy market remains a cause for concern arising from the significant recourse to this market measure for skimmed milk powder across the EU since September 2015.

Figures from the European Commission show there were approximately 376,000 tonnes of skimmed milk powder in public intervention stocks at the end of February effectively overhanging the EU skimmed milk powder market.

With specific regard to the tonnes of skimmed milk powder purchased into intervention, no quantities have been purchased since October 2017 as detailed in the most recent Milk Market Observatory Report published by the European Commission 23/03/2018. A total of 30,647 tonnes were offered to intervention in 2017, this is in addition to 334,551 tonnes offered in 2016 and 40,280 offered in 2015.

In relation to the sale of intervention stocks, the Commission has agreed to accept bids as part of its most recent tender process, for approximately 4,127 tonnes of SMP at a price of €105/100kg. A further 4337 tonnes were sold at a price of €110/100kg in February 2018 and a total of 1564 tonnes at a price of €119/100kg in January 2018.

Regarding the price offered by the Commission as referred to and the Commission's approach to this generally, my Department and I engaged at Council of Ministers meetings and directly with the Commission on recent measures to limit further stockpiling of skimmed milk

powder in 2018 without due justification, including the Commission's proposal to reduce the fixed-price ceiling to zero. I strongly argued that this measure should be specified as for 2018 only to avoid setting a precedent for the longer term. This point was accepted and agreed in the final version of the measure as adopted by the Council through Regulation No. (EU) 2018/147 of 29 January 2018.

I have clearly stated previously, at Council of Ministers meetings and elsewhere, that it is imperative that the Commission remains vigilant in monitoring the market and that it has contingencies in place in the event of market volatility re-emerging in relevant markets, particularly the raw milk, butter and skimmed milk powder markets. In common with the vast majority of EU member states where dairy production is of significance, I recognised that the current position on existing stocks could not be allowed to persist indefinitely and that there is general acceptance that doing nothing is not an option.

Given the Commission's status among the world's biggest players on the skimmed milk powder market, and as such its capacity to affect market sentiment, the Commission should act prudently and responsibly in the disposal of stocks. I am satisfied to date that the Commission has managed those stocks in a prudent manner.

My Department has engaged and will continue to engage with the Commission, with other member states, and with national stakeholders on these important issues.

Organic Farming Scheme Eligibility

324. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the payments a person (details supplied) should receive for the organics farming scheme each year since the commencement date of the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14904/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named is a participant in the Organic Farming Scheme. The area eligible for payment is the amount declared as organic on BPS for the year in question. However it should be noted that parcels included on certain actions in GLAS are not entitled to payment in the Organic Farming Scheme.

The person named has selected the GLAS actions Low Input Permanent Pasture and Traditional Hay Meadows so parcels that contain these actions are not entitled to a payment under the Organic Farming Scheme.

The Organic Farming Scheme attracts a payment of €220 per hectare during the 24 month in-conversion period and €170 per hectare for the remainder of the contract. The contract start date of the person named was 1 June 2015. Accordingly for 2017 he is entitled to payment for 7 months at the higher in-conversion rate and 5 months at the maintenance rate on an area eligible for payment under the Organic Farming Scheme of 23.494 hectares.

Organic Farming Scheme Payments

325. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the payments a person (details supplied) received for the organics farming scheme each year since the commencement date of the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14905/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named is a participant in the Organic Farming Scheme. The area eligible for payment is the amount declared as organic on BPS for the year in question. However it should be noted that parcels included on certain actions in GLAS or AEOS are not entitled to payment in the Organic Farming Scheme.

The person named has selected the GLAS actions Low Input Permanent Pasture and Traditional Hay Meadows so parcels that contain these actions are not entitled to a payment under the Organic Farming Scheme. He was previously an applicant in the AEOS and had selected actions there which similarly meant that some areas were not payable under the Organic Farming Scheme.

The Organic Farming Scheme attracts a payment of €220 per hectare during the 24 month in conversion period and €170 per hectare for the remainder of the contract. The contract start date of the person named was 1 June 2015.

Accordingly in 2017 he is entitled to payment for 7 months at the higher in conversion rate and 5 months at the maintenance rate on an area eligible for payment under the Organic Farming Scheme of 23.494 hectares. Due to his participation in AEOS he was not entitled to an Organic Farming Scheme payment on certain parcels therefore his area for payment in the Organic Farming Scheme in 2015 and 2016 was 13.79 hectares and 17.57 hectares respectively.

The following payments were processed in this case

2015 Advance Payment €1375.52

2015 Balance Payment €242.74

2015 Additional Payment €67.23

2016 Advance Payment €3287.40

2016 Balance Payment €580.20

2017 Advance Payment €3898.23

Organic Farming Scheme

326. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the area eligible under the organic farming scheme is 23.58 hectares for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14906/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named is a participant in the Organic Farming Scheme. The area eligible for payment is the amount declared as organic on BPS for the year in question. However it should be noted that parcels included on certain actions in GLAS are not entitled to payment in the Organic Farming Scheme.

The person named has selected the GLAS actions Low Input Permanent Pasture and Traditional Hay Meadows so parcels that contain these actions are not entitled to a payment under the Organic Farming Scheme.

Accordingly the area eligible for payment under the Organic Farming Scheme is 23.494 hectares.

Electric Vehicles

327. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the amount spent on constructing and maintaining the electric vehicle charging network in each year since 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14880/18]

349. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the process by which faulty or damaged electric vehicle charging points are identified and repaired; the average turnaround time for a charging point to be repaired; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14885/18]

354. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated cost of extending the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland electric vehicle grant in each of the years 2021 to 2026, assuming the 2020 targets for electric vehicle usage are met and not met, respectively. [14891/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 327, 349 and 354 together.

The Electric Vehicle purchase grant, administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, has been in place since 2011. A total of €6 million has allocated for payments under the scheme in my Department's budget this year .

The purchase grant scheme will be kept under review in relation to funding and grant amounts for future years. As the purchase grant scheme is demand-led it is not possible to accurately predict how many vehicles will be supported in future years.

The existing fleet of electric vehicle charge points was rolled out by the ESB, through its eCars programme. There are approximately 900 charge points in Ireland of which circa 70 are rapid chargers. The operation and repair of these charge points are an operational matter for the ESB.

In March 2014, the Commission for Regulation of Utilities approved an application from ESB Networks to recover the costs of a pilot project to a maximum of €25 million from use of system charges to cover the rollout of this infrastructure.

The Commission for Regulation of Utilities determined in October 2017 that the charging network should not form part of the regulated asset base and therefore development of the network should not be funded from use of system 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. The decision also set out the need for the electric vehicle charging infrastructure to operate on a commercial basis.

The Low Emissions Vehicle Taskforce is currently examining how best to support the development of public chargers and funding of €1.8m has been allocated in my Department's budget this year to support the provision of public charging.

Nuclear Plants

328. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a communication has been received from the UK Government in respect of the UK national policy statement for nuclear power above 1 GW single reactor capacity

post 2025 (details supplied); if so, when the communication was received; the nature of that communication; if a copy will be made available; the way in which this communication was handled by his Department; the response issued in respect of same; if the response will be made available; if no response issued, the reason therefor; if Ireland is being formally consulted by the UK on this matter; if not, if the State is seeking to assert such consultation rights; if not, the reason therefor; his plans to provide for public consultation on the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14501/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): While I have not received direct communication from the United Kingdom Government in this matter, I am aware that my colleague the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government received correspondence from the United Kingdom authorities on 7 December 2017, informing him of the carrying out of a public consultation on the process and criteria for designating potentially suitable sites in a new National Policy Statement for nuclear power projects with over 1GW of single reactor capacity for the period 2026-2035.

The correspondence was subsequently forwarded to my Department, and the matter will be discussed at next month's meeting of the United Kingdom-Ireland Contact Group on Radiological Matters. This group, comprising officials from United Kingdom and Irish Government Departments, and scientific agencies responsible for ensuring radiological safety, meet biannually to discuss matters of interest to both parties including the United Kingdom's new nuclear build programme.

Nuclear Waste

329. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if communication has been received from the UK Government in respect of proposals for engaging communities in Northern Ireland and England that may wish to host a geological disposal facility for radioactive waste (details supplied); if so, when the communication was received; the nature of the communication; if a copy will be made available; the way in which this communication was handled by his Department; the response in respect of same; if the response will be made available; if no response issued, the reason therefor; if Ireland is being formally consulted by the UK on this matter; if not, if the State is seeking to assert such consultation rights; if not, the reason therefor; his plans to provide for public consultation on the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14502/18]

330. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if Ireland has received communication from the UK Government in respect of a national policy statement for geological disposal infrastructure (details supplied); if so, when the communication was received; the nature of that communication; if a copy will be made available to Dáil Éireann; the way in which this communication was handled by his Department; the response from the State in respect of same; if the response is available to Dáil Éireann; if no response issued, the reason therefor; if Ireland is being formally consulted by the UK on this matter; if not, if the State is seeking to assert such consultation rights; if not, the reason therefor; his plans to provide for public consultation on the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14503/18]

331. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if communication has been received from the Welsh Government in respect of proposals for engaging communities in Wales that may wish to host a geological disposal facility for radioactive waste; if so, when the communication was received; the nature of that communication; if a copy will be made available; the way in which this communication was

handled by his Department; the response that was issued in respect of same; if the response will be made available; if no response issued, the reason therefor; if Ireland is being formally consulted by the UK on this matter; if not, if the State is seeking to assert such consultation rights; if not, the reason therefor; his plans to provide for public consultation on the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14504/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 329 to 331, inclusive, together.

I have not received communication from the United Kingdom Government in this matter.

I understand that consultations have commenced within the UK to enable stakeholders and members of the public to submit comments on the geological disposal programme. These consultations are of a general nature and are appropriate to an internal UK audience.

The United Kingdom-Ireland Contact Group on Radiological Matters, comprising officials from United Kingdom and Irish Government Departments, and scientific agencies responsible for ensuring radiological safety, meet biannually to discuss matters of interest to both parties, including long-term strategies to safely store radiological and nuclear waste. Ireland will engage on this matter through this group, which will meet in Dublin next month, and continue to monitor developments in this area.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

332. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to promote the inclusion of greenhouse gas emission reduction as an indicator for successful outcomes within Project Ireland 2040; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14526/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): As part of Project Ireland 2040, the National Planning Framework will guide national development and prioritised investment over the next two decades. The National Development Plan 2018-2027 is a ten year strategy for public capital investment which will support the implementation of the National Planning Framework. Both documents have a shared set of National Strategic Outcomes, including addressing Ireland's transition to a low-carbon and climate-resilient society. The National Development Plan commits funding of €21.8 billion towards climate action investments, including some €14 billion to be invested by Ireland's semi-state companies and by the private sector. This means that almost €1 in every €5 to be spent in the framework of the National Development Plan over the next decade will be on climate action, with a strong focus on strategic investments in the areas of transport, renewable energy, grid development and interconnection, the built environment, and flood risk management, to address the significant climate change challenges that Ireland faces.

The National Development Plan funding commitments provide a clear opportunity for significant upscaling in our investments to deliver deep emissions reductions in the coming decade and to further develop and implement the National Mitigation Plan. This will be essential both in order to meet Ireland's targets, under the draft EU Effort Sharing Regulation, for a 30% reduction in non-ETS sector by 2030, relative to 2005 levels, as well as to make significant progress towards Ireland's National Transition Objective for 2050 to reduce carbon dioxide emissions in Ireland by at least 80% (compared to 1990 levels) and, in parallel, to pursue an approach to carbon neutrality in the agriculture and land-use sector, including forestry, which does not compromise capacity for sustainable food production.

The National Mitigation Plan is itself a living document that will be updated as on-going analysis, dialogue and technological innovation generate more and more cost-effective sectorial mitigation options. The most recent list of measures currently in place in the context of National Mitigation Plan is set out in the 2017 Annual Transition Statement, which I laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas on 8 December last. This Statement details the key measures in place in the respective sectors, the objective for each measure, estimated mitigation potential and funding information, where appropriate.

In relation to the role of outcome indicators within Project Ireland 2040, I understand that the Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2016 provides a legislative basis for the National Planning Framework, a monitoring process in relation to its implementation and a statutory requirement for regular reviews and updates into the future, together with the proposed establishment of an independent Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR). That National Planning Framework proposes that this new Office will have an independent monitoring role, and its functions will include providing advice to the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, to the Government as a whole and to the Oireachtas, on the implementation of the National Planning Framework under the statutory planning process, through new Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, local authority statutory planning processes and the decisions of An Bord Pleanála, and using a new set of indicators to be developed to assist effective monitoring.

In relation to the role of greenhouse gas emissions reductions as an indicator of successful outcomes within Project Ireland 2040, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is the competent authority in Ireland for the preparation and annual publication of official inventories and projections of greenhouse gas emissions and for reporting this data to the European Union and to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. A summary of the most recent inventory and projections prepared by the EPA is also included in the Annual Transition Statement as laid before the Houses.

Climate Change Policy

333. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the way in which the public will be informed and engaged on climate action as required under the Aarhus Convention; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14527/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Ireland ratified the Aarhus Convention in June 2012 and it entered into force in September 2012. Article 7 of the Aarhus Convention provides for public participation concerning plans, programmes and policies relating to the environment. This requires that each Party “make appropriate practical and/or other provisions for the public to participate during the preparation of plans and programmes relating to the environment, within a transparent and fair framework, having provided the necessary information to the public.” Article 7 further requires that the public be provided with opportunities for early public participation when all options are open; that they are provided with reasonable timeframes for participation and that due account is taken of the outcome of the public participation in any decision taken. The application of Aarhus Convention requirements to public participation in climate action policy development is given expression in the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 (the 2015 Act). Section 4(8) of that Act requires the Minister to consult on a draft of each national mitigation plan and to have regard to submissions made in response to such consultation. Section 5(3) of the 2015 Act contains equivalent provisions in relation to each draft national adaptation

framework.

I held a public consultation on the draft National Mitigation Plan and on the accompanying Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment from 15 March to 26 April 2017. 124 submissions were received in response to this consultation and have been published on my Department's website. The final Strategic Environmental Assessment, published with the National Mitigation Plan in July 2017, addresses how the views of consultees and stakeholders influenced the preparation of the final Plan.

A separate public consultation took place on the draft National Adaptation Framework from 15 September to 27 October 2017. 27 submissions were received from a wide range of stakeholders including academics, political parties, public bodies, business representatives and citizens.

In addition to the respective public consultations, the independent Climate Change Advisory Council, in accordance with the provisions of the 2015 Act, submitted its views to me on the drafts of both the National Mitigation Plan and National Adaptation Framework. These submissions are published on my Department's website and on the Council's website at www.climatecouncil.ie.

In accordance with section 14 of the 2015 Act I have, to date, presented two Annual Transition Statements, in 2016 and 2017, to the Houses of the Oireachtas. Both Statements are also available on my Department's website. Each Statement provides an overview of climate change mitigation and adaptation policy measures adopted to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases and to adapt to the effects of climate change in order to enable the achievement of the national transition objective, a record of emissions of greenhouse gases and projections of future emissions prepared by the Environmental Protection Agency, and a report on compliance with obligations of the State under EU law and relevant international agreements.

In parallel with and in order to inform the on-going development of national policy on climate action, I launched a National Dialogue on Climate Action in 2017. My Department is currently preparing a series of regional and local events under the auspices of the National Dialogue to engage citizens as participants in mobilising action on the low carbon transition at local and community level. I envisage that this will, in turn, help to further inform policy development at local and national levels. I intend to announce details of a pilot regional event shortly.

Energy Policy

334. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the way in which energy security for all will be provided into the future; the way in which this will be managed through State and citizen-owned public private partnership or through private ownership; if firm policies and statutory requirements will be developed in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14528/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Energy security is one of the three key pillars of our energy policy, along with sustainability and competitiveness. Ireland's Energy Policy White Paper commits to radically reducing our greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. We have embarked on a firm course to sustainability, mindful of the need to balance competitiveness and security of supply through the period of transition, as fossil fuels will be curtailed and eventually eliminated in our energy mix through a range of reduction and substitution measures using more sustainable alternatives. Ireland's energy policy, including security of supply, is fully aligned with the EU's climate and

energy objectives on the transition to decarbonisation. This involves continuous and ongoing review of policies to reduce harmful emissions, improve energy efficiency, incentivise efficient and sustainable infrastructure investment, integrate markets, and promote research and innovation while ensuring our energy security of supply is maintained and enhanced.

The National Mitigation Plan, which I published last July, restates the Government's commitment to move from a fossil fuel-based electricity system to a low-carbon power system in a secure and sustainable way, including promotion of energy efficiency, and smart operation of the existing grid for maximum benefit. Investment in further renewable generation will be incentivised, as well as in other low or zero-carbon technologies such as pumped storage and battery technology.

The National Development Plan 2018-2027 sets out clear measures towards decarbonisation, including the upgrading of 45,000 homes every year from 2021 to make them energy efficient, up to 4,500MW of renewable electricity generation, roll-out of the support scheme for renewable heat, and commitments on electric vehicles and low-emission public transport.

Reaching our climate objectives while maintaining secure and reliable sources of energy will require a broad range of actions by citizens, businesses and the public sector. I recognise that sufficient flexibility will be needed, including, where necessary, in relation to funding and governance arrangements for actions, so that we achieve the transition that delivers the best outcomes in security of supply, sustainability and competitiveness for our citizens and businesses.

Climate Change Policy

335. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on whether there should be a statutory requirement to have experts at the decision-making table at national, regional and local level to ensure Ireland meets its obligations under the Paris Agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14531/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): National climate policy development is supported by robust arrangements for the provision of scientific and technical advice which, in turn, supports policy implementation at national, regional and local levels. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is the competent authority in Ireland for the preparation and annual publication of official inventories and projections of greenhouse gas emissions and for reporting this data to the European Union and to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The Oireachtas receives a summary of the most recent inventory and projections prepared by the EPA each year in the Annual Transition Statement, which is mandated by the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 (the 2015 Act). The most recent such statement was laid before the Houses on 8 December last.

The EPA also provides a range of expert scientific and technical advice on climate change to the Government and produces, in accordance with its statutory mandate, a quadrennial State of the Environment Report which provides an integrated assessment of the overall quality of Ireland's environment, the pressures being placed on it and the societal responses to current and emerging environmental issues. The last such report was published in 2016, includes a specific focus on climate change, and is available from the EPA's website at:

<http://epa.ie/irelandsenvironment/stateoftheenvironmentreport>.

The Climate Change Advisory Council, an independent body established under Section 8

of the 2015 Act, is mandated to provide advice and recommendations to me, to relevant sectoral Ministers and to the Government in relation to the development and implementation of the National Mitigation Plan and National Adaptation Framework. The Council is also tasked with advising on matters relating to the achievement of Ireland's objective to transition to a low carbon, climate resilient and sustainable economy by 2050. Since November 2016, the Advisory Council has produced three reports which are available from the Council's website at www.climatecouncil.ie.

Technical capacity for climate action policy development and implementation is provided through the Technical Research and Modelling Group (TRAM), which was established by Government Decision in 2015 and is chaired by my Department. TRAM is a high level cross-departmental technical group, with representation from relevant Government Departments and Agencies, supported by a number of academic institutions. TRAM reports to the Climate Action High Level Steering Group, and to the Cabinet Committee on Infrastructure as required.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

336. Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the provisions in place for climate change in the Project Ireland 2040 framework (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14532/18]

339. Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on the way in which investments will be prioritised effectively to provide a viable economic future while at the same time honouring global commitments in greenhouse gas emission reduction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14601/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 336 and 339 together.

Under the Paris Agreement, the EU has committed, on behalf of its Member States, to a reduction of at least 40% in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, to be achieved by reductions in the Emission Trading System (ETS) sector of 43% and in the non-ETS sector of 30%. With regard to Ireland's contribution, in December 2017, the European Parliament and Council reached a provisional agreement on a target of a 30% reduction in Ireland's 2005 emissions by 2030, with a starting point of May 2019, based on average emissions over the period 2016 to 2018. This proposal follows extensive negotiations, during which Ireland emphasised the need to prioritise a successful conclusion which retains a high environmental ambition for the EU, but provides each Member State with the capacity to contribute to that ambition in a cost-effective and fair manner.

The latest Environmental Protection Agency report on greenhouse gas emissions projections, published April 2017, indicates that Ireland is expected to exceed its annual limits from 2017 onwards, and that emissions could be between 4% and 6% below 2005 levels by 2020. The projected shortfall to our targets in 2020 reflects both the constrained investment capacity over the past decade due to the economic crisis, and the extremely challenging nature of the target itself. In fact, it is now accepted that Ireland's 2020 target was not consistent with what would be achievable on an EU wide cost-effective basis.

Considering this, Ireland's 2030 target will present a very significant challenge, the scale and complexity of which is not underestimated by this Government. As a means to addressing the climate challenge, I published Ireland's first statutory National Mitigation Plan in July 2017.

It provides a framework to guide investment decisions by Government in domestic measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The Plan does not provide a complete roadmap to achieve either Ireland's proposed 2030 target or the 2050 transition objective. However, it has established the framework for the development and implementation of medium-to-long-term policy options so as to achieve progressive emissions reductions in each of its four key sectors with the most significant contribution to national emissions (Electricity Generation; the Built Environment; Transport; and Agriculture, Forestry and Land Use). The Plan is a living document that will be updated as on-going analysis, dialogue and technological innovation generate more and more cost-effective sectorial mitigation options.

The most recent list of measures currently in place in the context of the National Mitigation Plan is set out in the 2017 Annual Transition Statement, which I laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas on 8 December last. This Statement details the key measures in place in the respective sectors, the objective for each measure, estimated mitigation potential and funding information, where appropriate.

Building on the approach set out in the National Mitigation Plan, the recently launched Project Ireland 2040 reaffirms the Government's commitment to transitioning Ireland to a low carbon, climate resilient economy and society. As part of Project Ireland 2040, the National Planning Framework will guide national development and prioritised investment over the next two decades. Implementation of the National Planning Framework at a local and regional level will take place in the context of, inter alia, new Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, development plans and local authority statutory planning processes. The Framework does not, therefore, address specific provisions in relation to climate change for individual towns or local authority areas.

Under the new National Development Plan, Exchequer funding of €7.6 billion, together with investment of €14.2 billion by commercial State bodies will ensure a step change in strategic climate action investments. This means that almost €1 in every €5 to be spent in the framework of the National Development Plan over the next decade will be on climate action, with a strong focus on strategic investments in the areas of transport, renewable energy, grid development and interconnection, the built environment, and flood risk management, to address the significant climate change challenges that Ireland faces. Furthermore, a new Climate Action Fund, with an allocation of €500m, has been designed to leverage additional investment by public and private entities in climate action measures.

During the period of the Plan, key capital investments to be overseen by my Department will comprise some:

- €3.8 billion on upgrading the energy efficiency rating to achieve a minimum of BER Rating B in the existing residential, commercial and public building stock. Coupled with this, new buildings will be regulated to the highest standards and the roll-out of digital connectivity will facilitate "smart buildings";

- €1 billion on rolling out energy-efficient heating technologies under the Support Scheme for Renewable Heat aimed at large heat users, along with support for heat pumps and roof solar in at least 170,000 homes;

- €0.2 billion to incentivise the uptake of 500,000 electric vehicles by 2030, and provide additional charging infrastructure. Related support measures include a ban on new non-zero emission cars being sold in Ireland after 2030 and no NCT certificate for non-zero emission cars after 2045

- €0.1 billion on energy research funding to accelerate diversification away from fossil fuels

to green energy.

This funding commitment provides a clear opportunity for significant upscaling in our investments to deliver deep emissions reductions in the coming decade and to further develop and implement the National Mitigation Plan. This will be essential in order to meet Ireland's 2030 targets, as well as to make significant progress towards Ireland's National Transition Objective for 2050 to reduce carbon dioxide emissions in Ireland by at least 80% (compared to 1990 levels) and, in parallel, to pursue an approach to carbon neutrality in the agriculture and land-use sector, including forestry, which does not compromise capacity for sustainable food production.

Departmental Staff Training

337. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the amount that his Department has spent on social media training and consultancy in each year since 2016. [14563/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): My Department did not incur any expenditure on social media training or social media consultancy in 2016 or 2017. In 2018, €1,900 has been expended on consultancy on the preparation of a social media campaign as part of the ongoing awareness and education campaign on waste and recycling.

Departmental Staff Training

338. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if training has been delivered in his Department on the use of social media (details supplied); the frequency and cost of this training; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14579/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): No training has been delivered to staff in my Department, to date, on the use of social media.

Question No. 339 answered with Question No. 336.

Waste Management Regulations

340. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on the decision by a company (details supplied) to locate a new plastics recycling facility in the UK instead of here; the measures he plans to take to alleviate the regulatory challenges which the company cited as causing difficulties in locating here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14607/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): A specific investment decision by a private company providing services in both Ireland and the United Kingdom is a matter for that company and its board. In my role as Minister, the company, which has grown its operations in Ireland over many years, has not made me aware of regulatory challenges to its further development in Ireland. The Waste Management Act 1996 and the Waste Management (Licensing) Regulations 2004 govern the process under which waste licence applications can be made to the EPA. This is an open and transparent pro-

cess and aims to strike a balance between the interests of all stakeholders. I have no function in relation to the assessment of licence applications and under section 60(3) of the Waste Management Act 1996, as Minister, I am precluded from exercising any power or control in relation to the performance by the EPA, in particular circumstances, of a statutory function vested in it.

Individual planning decisions are a matter for the relevant planning authority. Broader planning issues affecting the development of industry in Ireland are matters for my colleague the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government.

Departmental Contracts Data

341. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the value of contracts for services awarded to a company (details supplied) by his Department since 2010 in tabular form; and the type of work undertaken by the company. [14624/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): No contracts were awarded by my Department to Acrux Consultants since 2010.

Broadband Service Provision

342. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when high-speed broadband will be rolled out in an area (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14675/18]

343. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when high-speed broadband will be rolled out in an area (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14676/18]

344. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when high-speed broadband will be rolled out in an area (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14677/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 342, 343 and 344 together.

The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector. 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.

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

The Map is colour coded and searchable by address/eircode:

- The AMBER areas represent the target areas for the proposed State led Intervention under

the NBP and are the subject of an ongoing procurement process.

- The BLUE represent those areas where commercial providers are either currently delivering or have plans to deliver high speed broadband services.

- The LIGHT BLUE areas represent eir's commercial rural deployment plans to roll-out high speed broadband to 300,000 premises by the end of this year as part of a Commitment Agreement signed with me in April.

The following table details the percentage of premises to be covered by the State Intervention and through commercial investment in the areas identified by the Deputy.

Townland	Total Premises	Premises within the NBP Intervention Area	Premises within Commercial Operator's Area	Premises within eir planned rural deployment
Gurteenroe (Millstreet Road)	614	17% (102)	83% (512)	0% (0)
Garranagappul (Clondrohid)	102	15% (15)	85% (87)	0% (0)
Coolmucky (Cloughduv)	85	45% (38)	45% (38)	0% (0)
Ryecourt (Cloughduv)	91	9% (8)	87% (79)	4% (4)

In April 2017, I signed a Commitment Agreement with eir in relation to its plans to provide high speed broadband to 300,000 premises in rural areas on a commercial basis. eir has committed to completing the roll-out by the end of this year. Information on eir's planned rural deployment is available at

<http://fibrerollout.ie/eircode-lookup/>.

A copy of the Commitment Agreement is available on my Department's website www.dccae.gov.ie.

Quarterly updates on eir's rural deployment are published on this website. eir has passed a total of 121,000 premises as of December 2017.

Premises where commercial providers are not currently delivering or have indicated no plans to deliver high speed broadband services will be addressed through the National Broadband Plan State led Intervention.

My Department is in a formal procurement process to select a company who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network in the State intervention area. That procurement process is now in its final stages.

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

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

North-South Interconnector

345. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when he plans to publish the report he commissioned on the proposed North South interconnector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14855/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The North South Interconnector, as proposed as an overhead line, now has full planning permission in both Ireland and Northern Ireland. Following engagements with representative groups and Oireachtas members in relation to the motions passed in Dáil and Seanad Éireann early last year I commissioned two independent studies into the project. The studies are designed to address the main points of the motions as well as key concerns expressed by those parties opposed to the development of an overhead line.

It is my intention that the two studies will provide some clarity to the concerned residents of the affected areas. The results of both studies are expected shortly and I will publish the reports and ensure they will be made available to all interested parties.

Broadband Service Provision

346. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his attention has been drawn to the need to upgrade broadband telecommunications infrastructure throughout counties Cavan and Monaghan; the improvements that will be undertaken in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14856/18]

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

The Map is colour coded and searchable by address/eircode.

The following table details the percentage of premises to be covered by the State Intervention and through commercial investment in Counties Cavan and Monaghan.

County	Total Premises	Premises within the NBP Intervention Area (AMBER)	Premises within Commercial Operators Area (BLUE)	Premises within eir planned rural deployment (LIGHT BLUE)
Cavan	41,991	16,942	19,439	5,610
Monaghan	32,945	15,655	14,668	2,622

Individuals can check which category their premises falls into by going to my Department's website www.broadband.gov.ie and entering their eircode into the High Speed Broadband Map.

In April 2017, I signed a Commitment Agreement with eir in relation to its plans to provide high speed broadband to 300,000 premises in rural areas on a commercial basis. eir has committed to completing the roll-out by the end of this year. Information on eir's planned rural deployment is available at

<http://fibrerollout.ie/eircode-lookup/>.

A copy of the Commitment Agreement is available on my Department's website *www.dccae.gov.ie*.

Quarterly updates on eir's rural deployment are published on this website. As of December 2017 eir has passed nearly 4,500 premises in Cavan and Monaghan as part of its roll-out. A further almost 8,000 are scheduled to be passed before the end of this year.

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.

Delivering connectivity to the 542,000 premises (including over 32,500 in Cavan and Monaghan) that fall within the State led intervention under the NBP remains a Government priority and my Department will engage with the winning bidder to ensure the most efficient deployment as part of the contract.

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

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

National Broadband Plan

347. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the national broadband plan; the date by which he plans to award the contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14883/18]

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. In April 2017 I published an updated High Speed Broadband Map, available at www.broadband.gov.ie, which shows those areas that will be served by commercial operators and those that will be included in the State Intervention Area under the National Broadband Plan (NBP).

There are over 2.3 million premises in the State. Approximately 542,000 fall within the

AMBER area and will be covered under the State Led Intervention. Over 1.6 million premises are in a BLUE area and are or will be covered by commercial providers, while approximately 180,000 are LIGHT BLUE and fall to be covered under ongoing rural deployment by eir.

In April 2017, I signed a Commitment Agreement with eir in relation to its plans to provide High speed broadband to 300,000 premises in rural areas on a commercial basis by the end of this year. eir has passed a total of 121,000 premises as of December 2017.

My Department is in a formal procurement process to engage 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.

Telecommunications Services Data

348. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of homes in each county without access to a broadband connection in tabular form. [14884/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I assume the Deputy's question refers to the number of premises in Ireland that do not yet have access to a high speed broadband service. In April 2017 I published an updated High Speed Broadband Map which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie. This map shows the areas targeted by commercial operators to provide high speed broadband services and the areas that will be included in the State Intervention Area under the National Broadband Plan (NBP).

The Map is colour coded and searchable by address/eircode:

- Premises in the AMBER do not currently have access to a high speed broadband connection. They are to be provided with access by the planned State led Intervention under the NBP, which is the subject of an ongoing procurement process. There are approximately 540,000 AMBER premises nationally.

- Premises in the LIGHT BLUE areas do not currently have access to a high speed broadband connection. They are to be provided with access via commercial investment as part eir's ongoing rural deployment. There are over 180,000 LIGHT BLUE premises nationally.

- Premises in the BLUE area are to be served with a high speed broadband connection by commercial operators and there are over 1.6 Million such premises nationally.

A county by county breakdown for Q4 2017 of premises in the AMBER, BLUE and LIGHT BLUE areas is attached.

Question No. 349 answered with Question No. 327.

Illegal Dumping

350. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the amount spent on removing and disposing of illegally dumped waste in 2017; the amount allocated for same in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14886/18]

351. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and

Environment the number of complaints his Department received about illegal dumping in each year since 2011, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14887/18]

352. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the amount spent on anti-dumping public awareness campaigns since 2011; the main projects and initiatives paid for by the funding; and the amount that he has budgeted for this in 2018, in tabular form. [14888/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 350 to 352, inclusive, together.

Enforcement actions against illegal waste activity are a matter for the Local Authorities and the Office of Environmental Enforcement (OEE) within the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). While this Department does not compile statistics in relation to complaints made, information is available through the Local Government Management Agency's website

<http://www.lgma.ie/en/publication-category/service-indicator-reports-2004-2010>

and the EPA's website

<http://www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/enforcement/performanceframework/focusonlocalauthori-tyenvironmentalenforcement2014-2016performancereport.html>.

The total cost of illegal dumping is not collated by my Department as it includes local authority enforcement, disposal and legal costs and also involves costs for other State agencies such as An Garda Síochána.

In recognition of the impact of illegal dumping on communities across the country, my Department has developed an Anti-Dumping Initiative to identify high risk or problem areas, develop appropriate enforcement responses and carry out clean-up operations in partnership with local authorities and community organisations. In 2017, funding of €1.3 million was provided to local authorities under this initiative. Further details of the funding provided is available on my Department's website at <https://www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/news-and-media/press-releases/Pages/Naughten-increases-funds-to-.aspx>. The initiative was overseen by the Waste Enforcement Regional Lead Authorities (WERLAs) and each of the 31 local authorities participated. Over 200 projects were funded and included

- clean-up operations - removing over 2,500 tonnes of waste;
- awareness campaigns - social media campaigns, leaflets;
- preventative measures - installation of signage and fencing;
- surveillance operations - CCTV, drone and trail surveillance;
- SMART enforcement equipment and resources for waste enforcement officers.

This year, I am increasing the allocation to €2 million to build on the momentum created. All local authorities have been invited to apply.

EU Directives

353. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the EU directives that fall within his Department's remit not yet transposed into law; the deadline imposed by the EU for the transposition of same; the estimated date for trans-

position into law; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14889/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the following table:

Directive	Title	Deadline
2013/59	Council Directive 2013/59/Euratom of 5 December 2013 laying down basic safety standards for protection against the dangers arising from exposure to ionising radiation, and repealing Directives 89/618/Euratom, 90/641/Euratom, 96/29/Euratom, 97/43/Euratom and 2003/122/Euratom.	06/02/2018 Primary legislation is required to enable transposition of the Directive. The primary legislation was published on 20 February with a view to early enactment.
2016/2284	DIRECTIVE (EU) 2016/2284 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 14 December 2016 on the reduction of national emissions of certain atmospheric pollutants, amending Directive 2003/35/EC and repealing Directive 2001/81/EC.	01/07/2018
2015/1513	Directive (EU) 2015/1513 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 September 2015 amending Directive 98/70/EC relating to the quality of petrol and diesel fuels and amending Directive 2009/28/EC on the promotion of the use of energy from renewable sources.	10/09/2017 - transposing legislation will be finalised shortly.
2015/996	Commission Directive (EU) 2015/996 of 19 May 2015 establishing common noise assessment methods according to Directive 2002/49/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council.	31/12/2018
2016/1148	Directive (EU) 2016/1148 concerning measures for a high common level of security of network and information systems across the Union	06/05/2018 - transposing legislation will be finalised shortly.
2014/910	Regulation (EU) 910/2014 on electronic identification and trust services for electronic transactions.	May 2018
2016/2102	DIRECTIVE (EU) 2016/2102 of 26 October 2016 on the accessibility of the websites and mobile applications of public sector bodies	23/09/2018

Directive	Title	Deadline
2017/2096	COMMISSION DIRECTIVE (EU) 2017/2096 of 15 November 2017 amending Annex II to Directive 2000/53/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on end-of-life vehicles	6 June 2018
2014/52	DIRECTIVE 2014/52/EU of 16 April 2014 amending Directive 2011/92/EU on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment.	Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government is the lead Department, but a number of other Departments, including my Department, have transposition responsibilities

Question No. 354 answered with Question No. 327.

Electric Vehicles

355. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the average motor tax cost applicable to an electric vehicle; the amount applicable to a hybrid vehicle; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14890/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): There is a single annual motor tax rate of €120 for a private electric vehicle. In respect of electric goods vehicles, an annual rate of €92 applies to vehicles with an unladen weight not exceeding 1,500 kilograms. Hybrid vehicles are taxed on the same basis as private vehicles i.e. taxed on the CO2 emissions level of the vehicle for vehicles registered since 2008, and taxed on the basis of engine capacity for pre-2008 vehicles. Rates range from €170 to €2,350 annually.

Public Transport

356. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the promised stakeholders forum on public transport; the timeline and details of the proposed work of the forum; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14511/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, following on from a commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government and as further committed to in the latter part of 2017, work is underway in the Department on reviewing public transport policy “to ensure services are sustainable into the future and are meeting the needs of a modern economy”.

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

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

Tourism Policy

357. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to drive policy towards the development of a coastal walkway of Ireland with an emphasis initially on the Atlantic economic corridor and the Wild Atlantic Way; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14524/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): My Department's role in relation to tourism lies in the area of national tourism policy development. It is not directly involved in the management or development of individual tourism projects, such as the Wild Atlantic Way. These are operational matters for the Board and Management of Fáilte Ireland.

I am aware that Fáilte Ireland's Experience Brands have been developed to present different parts of Ireland as compelling tourism experiences of scale and singularity internationally. The Wild Atlantic Way, Ireland's Ancient East and the Dublin brand are overarching brands under which destinations and individuals can trade collectively with greater visibility and clarity of message in the international marketplace.

I understand that Fáilte Ireland is currently tendering for a pilot study to look at potential options to link the existing Kerry Way and Dingle Way walking trails with a view to informing a full route feasibility study in respect of a coastal trail along the Wild Atlantic Way. The tender for the pilot study has just been published this week.

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

Appointments to State Boards

358. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the appointment of persons with disabilities to the boards of State agencies under his control; the timeline for these appointments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14550/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As I committed to at a recent Joint Oireachtas Committee meeting, a campaign to appoint people with specific personal experience of disability to the boards of the public transport agencies was launched on 26th March 2018.

All information relating to the process is available at the following link <http://www.stateboards.ie/stateboards/campaignAdvert/75495/booklet.htm> or www.stateboards.ie

Taxi Data

359. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of taxis converted for use by wheelchair users that are available; the average number of journeys taken by a taxi per year; the average number of journeys provided to wheelchair users; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14551/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry, including the licensing of wheelchair accessible SPSVs, is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the *Taxi Regulation Act 2013*.

I have referred your questions to the NTA for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Departmental Staff Training

360. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount that his Department has spent on social media training and consultancy in each year since 2016. [14575/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The information requested by the Deputy is available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.dttas.ie/corporate/english/expenditure-external-services>

The information is updated twice yearly . The second six months of 2017 will be published shortly. The first six months of 2018 will be published later in the year.

Departmental Staff Training

361. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if training has been delivered in his Department on the use of social media (details supplied); the frequency and cost of this training; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14591/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Department does not currently maintain any permanent social media presence and has not to date delivered training to staff on the use of the identified social media platforms.

Rail Network Expansion

362. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason that the DART underground is not included in the National Development Plan; and if the reports on which the decision was made not to include it will be provided. [14592/18]

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 question 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.

Sports Capital Programme Applications Data

363. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason each sports capital appeal applicant was successful or unsuccessful for funding under the recently announced grants, by county, applicant, grant amount sought and grant amount awarded if successful in tabular form. [14619/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): 149 appeals were submitted in respect of the 2017 Sports Capital Programme (SCP) and of these, 35 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 guide to making an application was not sufficiently clear in relation to why the proposed project may be invalid, or where it was felt the original decision involved an overly strict interpretation of the SCP terms and conditions. Appeals were unsuccessful if it was felt that none of these conditions applied. All of these unsuccessful appellants have been given the reasons why their application remains invalid but have also 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.

A summary of the reasons why appeals were upheld or rejected for all 149 appeals is set out in the spreadsheet in the following link.

[[Table 1](/debates%20authoring/webattachments.nsf/0/27DA6094355024798025825E0058B867/$File/Basic%20Safety%20Standards%20Directive%20Consultation%20questionnaire.docx?openelement)]

Consultancy Contracts

364. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the value of contracts for services awarded to a company (details supplied) by his Department since 2010, in tabular form; and the type of work undertaken by the company. [14636/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The information requested by the Deputy is available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.dttas.ie/corporate/english/expenditure-external-services>

The information is updated twice yearly. The second six months of 2017 will be published shortly. The first six months of 2018 will be published later in the year.

Greenways Development

365. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the greenway projects under consideration in County Wicklow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14768/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): My Department does not currently have an open call for Greenways funding and is therefore not considering any greenway proposals at present.

As you will be aware my Department is in the process of developing a Strategy for the future development of Greenways. The strategy will ensure that Greenways are constructed to an appropriately high standard in order to provide a quality experience for all users.

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

Given the National Transport Authority's (NTA) responsibility for the development and implementation of cycling infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area in co-operation with each local authority, I am forwarding the Deputy's question to the NTA for their consideration and comment on greenway projects under consideration and for direct reply to the Deputy. If you have not received a reply from the NTA within 10 working days please contact my private office.

Road Network

366. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the development of additional capacity for the M11 and N11; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14769/18]

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

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

Greenways Funding

367. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the grant application in respect of the development of a greenway in counties Leitrim and Cavan; when this application will be approved and funding allocated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14777/18]

368. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the grant application in respect of the development of a greenway in counties Sligo and Leitrim; when this application will be approved and funding allocated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14778/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 367 and 368 together.

You will be aware that my Department is in the process of developing a Strategy for the future development of Greenways. The strategy will ensure that Greenways are constructed to an appropriately high standard in order to provide a quality experience for all users.

I understand that applications were submitted to Fáilte Ireland in 2016 by Cavan, Leitrim and Sligo County Councils under the Grants Scheme for Large Tourism Projects. However, a decision was taken by Fáilte Ireland, following consultation with the Tourism Development Division of my Department, to postpone the evaluation of all applications relating to greenway development. This decision was taken given the preparation of the Greenway Strategy and to ensure a consistent and cohesive approach to the development of greenways in Ireland and the alignment of public policy and funding.

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

Sports Capital Programme Applications

369. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if funding will be allocated for the upgrading of sporting facilities at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14779/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Sports Capital Programme is the primary means of providing Government support to sports clubs and organisations for sports capital works. A request from St Tiarnach's GFC Clones, supported by the Monaghan GAA County Board, the GAA Ulster Council and the Central Council of the GAA, for a special allocation of €350,000, was received by my Department last year. The proposed works included roof repairs, dressing room improvements and fencing work. A special allocation was sought as the amount required exceeded the maximum available under the Sports Capital Programme. This request is still being considered in my Department.

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 €100m available over the coming years. 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 projects under the SCP. 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.

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

I expect to have the terms and conditions of the LSSIF finalised in the coming months and an announcement will be made at that stage setting out in more detail how and when organisations can apply for the funding available.

Road Improvement Schemes

370. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if additional funding will be allocated to Cavan and Monaghan county councils for road improvements in view of the substantial damage to roads caused by recent storms; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14780/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local are the statutory responsibilities of Monaghan and Cavan County Councils, 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 local authority.

As indicated previously to the Deputy, I announced the 2018 regional and local road allocations on 29th January and all grant funding available to my Department has now been allocated. Cavan County Council was allocated €10.7million, an increase of €1.6million compared to the 2017 allocation, and Monaghan County Council was allocated €9.1million, and increase of €1.5million, compared to the 2017 allocation. It is for each Council to determine its priorities and decide its work programme on that basis, taking available grant funding and its own resources into account. There is no additional funding available to my Department.

I am aware that my colleague the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government has written to local authorities indicating that claims can be submitted to that Department for recoupment of costs associated with clean-up works and necessary immediate works which were undertaken in the aftermath of the recent severe weather.

Bus Services

371. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the near collapse of bus services in some parts of Dublin city at peak hours as a direct result of the Luas cross-city extension operations and increased traffic volumes, the resultant delays on these routes and the hardship inflicted on bus passengers; and if

he will convene an urgent forum with Dublin Bus, Luas and trade unions representing workers to hear of the disruption and seek emergency solutions to the ongoing crisis in public transport services. [14822/18]

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

The NTA's Transport Strategy for the GDA 2016-2035 provides the overarching framework for the planning and delivery of transport infrastructure and services for Dublin over the next two decades. Addressing urban congestion on both the strategic road network and locally in certain locations is an important theme in the Strategy. The measures proposed are linked to an analysis of current and projected levels of travel demand across the region.

In 2015, Dublin City Council and the NTA jointly published the Dublin City Centre Transport Study which sets out the various measures proposed for Dublin's city centre to ensure the efficient functioning of transport within the city centre. Those two bodies, in collaboration with Dublin Bus and TII, are progressively implementing the measures set out in that document to enable the continued development and growth of the city.

Budget 2018 provides for an increase in the multi-annual capital investment for public transport with a four-year capital envelope of €2.7 billion over the period 2018-2021. This substantial multi-annual envelope includes funding of over €770 million for the BusConnects programme to fundamentally transform our bus system and to address growing congestion in the Dublin region in the short to medium term, so that journeys for bus passengers will be fast, reliable, punctual, convenient and affordable.

The recently launched National Development Plan also identifies the BusConnects programme as a key public transport investment priority for completion in the GDA over the period of the plan.

Work is ongoing on the redesign of the bus services network in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) and also on infrastructure proposals for Core Bus Corridors which will be an integral part of the programme. When this work is complete, the NTA will launch public consultations that are expected to commence in April and May of this year. The results of the public consultation will inform the final decisions to be made on the network redesign, Core Bus Corridors routes and bus acquisition. The costs of the various elements of the overall BusConnects programme will be confirmed as part of the appropriate appraisal and procurement processes required under the Public Spending Code.

Noting the responsibility of the NTA in this matter, I have forwarded the Deputy's questions to the NTA for a more detailed reply. Please inform my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

EU Directives

372. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the EU directives that fall within his Department's remit not yet transposed into law; the deadline imposed by the EU for the transposition of same; the estimated date for transposition into law; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14870/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The information requested by the Deputy is contained in the following table:

Title	Transposition Deadline	Estimated Transposition Date
Directive (EU) 2016/2370 Title of 14 December 2016 amending Directive 2012/34/EU as regards the opening of the market for domestic passenger transport services by rail and the governance of the railway infrastructure	National transposition legislation must be in place by 25 December 2018	Points 6 to 8 and 11 of Article 1 shall apply from 1 January 2019 in time for the working timetable starting on 14 December 2020.
Directive (EU) 2016/797 of 11 May 2016 on the interoperability of the rail system within the European Union (recast).	National transposition legislation must be in place by 16 June 2019	Transposition period may be extended for one year but EUAR and EU Commission must be notified by 16 December 2018 and reasons given for the delay
Directive (EU) 2016/798 of 11 May 2016 on railway safety (recast).	National transposition legislation must be in place by 16 June 2019	Transposition period may be extended for one year but EUAR and EU Commission must be notified by 16 December 2018 and reasons given for the delay
Directive (EU) 2015/2302 on Package Travel and Linked Travel Arrangements	Due to be in transposed into Irish law by 01/01/2018 and in force by 01/07/2018	Target date for transposition is 01/07/2018
Directive 2014/94/EU of the European Parliament and of the council of 22 October 2014 on the deployment of alternative fuels infrastructure	was due for transposition by the 18th Nov 2016	Q2 2018
Directive (EU) 2017/159 implementing the Agreement concerning the implementation of the Work in Fishing Convention 2007 of the ILO.	15 November 2019	15 November 2019
Directive (EU) 2017/2108 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 November 2017 amending Directive 2009/45/EC on safety rules and standards for passenger ships.	21 December 2019	21 December 2019
Directive (EU) 2017/2109 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 November 2017 amending Council Directive 98/41/EC on the registration of persons sailing on board passenger ships operating to or from ports of the Member States of the Community and Directive 2010/65/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council on reporting formalities for ships arriving in and/or departing from ports of the Member States.	21 December 2019	21 December 2019
Directive (EU) 2017/2110 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 November 2017 on a system of inspections for the safe operation of ro-ro passenger ships and high-speed passenger craft in regular service and amending Directive 2009/16/EC and repealing Council Directive 1999/35/EC.	21 December 2019	21 December 2019

Title	Transposition Deadline	Estimated Transposition Date
Directive (EU) 2018/131 implementing the Agreement concluded by ECSCA and the ETF to amend Directive 2009/13/EC in accordance with the amendments of 2014 to the MLC, as approved by the ILC on 11 June 2014.	16 February 2020	16 February 2020
Directive (EU) 2017/2397 regarding recognition of professional qualifications in inland navigation and repealing Directives 91/672/EEC and 96/50/EC.	17 January 2022	17 January 2022
Directive (EU) 2016/1106 of 7 July 2016 amending Directive 2006/126/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on driving licences	1st January 2018	Transposition measures now close to completion. Currently with OPC
Directive 2014/45/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 3 April 2014 on periodic roadworthiness tests for motor vehicles and their trailers and repealing Directive 2009/40/EC Text with EEA relevance	20th May 2017	Draft S.I. Legally settled – preparation underway for printing
Directive 2014/47/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 3 April 2014 on the technical roadside inspection of the roadworthiness of commercial vehicles circulating in the Union and repealing Directive 2000/30/EC Text with EEA relevance	20th May 2017	Draft S.I. awaiting transposition of Directive 2014/45

Bus Services

373. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the steps his Department is taking to address the overcrowding on Dublin's bus system; and the process by which Dublin Bus can acquire new buses. [14871/18]

374. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the way in which his Department monitors demand for buses in Dublin city and its environs and ensures that the bus system is being managed as effectively as possible. [14872/18]

377. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the comparative analysis of congestion on main commuter routes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14876/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 373, 374 and 377 together.

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

The NTA's Transport Strategy for the GDA 2016-2035 provides the overarching framework for the planning and delivery of transport infrastructure and services for Dublin over the next two decades. Addressing urban congestion on both the strategic road network and locally in certain locations is an important theme in the Strategy. The measures proposed are linked to an

analysis of current and projected levels of travel demand across the region.

In 2015, Dublin City Council and the NTA jointly published the Dublin City Centre Transport Study which sets out the various measures proposed for Dublin's city centre to ensure the efficient functioning of transport within the city centre. Those two bodies, in collaboration with Dublin Bus and TII, are progressively implementing the measures set out in that document to enable the continued development and growth of the city.

Budget 2018 provides for an increase in the multi-annual capital investment for public transport with a four-year capital envelope of €2.7 billion over the period 2018-2021. This substantial multi-annual envelope includes funding of over €770 million for the BusConnects programme to fundamentally transform our bus system and to address growing congestion in the Dublin region in the short to medium term, so that journeys for bus passengers will be fast, reliable, punctual, convenient and affordable.

The recently launched National Development Plan also identifies the BusConnects programme as a key public transport investment priority for completion in the GDA over the period of the plan.

Work is ongoing on the redesign of the bus services network in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) and also on infrastructure proposals for Core Bus Corridors which will be an integral part of the programme. When this work is complete, the NTA will launch public consultations that are expected to commence in April and May of this year. The results of the public consultation will inform the final decisions to be made on the network redesign, Core Bus Corridors routes and bus acquisition. The costs of the various elements of the overall BusConnects programme will be confirmed as part of the appropriate appraisal and procurement processes required under the Public Spending Code.

Noting the responsibility of the NTA in this matter, I have forwarded the Deputy's questions to the NTA for a more detailed reply. Please inform my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Bus Services

375. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of times there have been delays to buses in Dublin in each of the years since 2016; and the reasons for these delays, for example, scheduling error, mechanical breakdown and so on in tabular form. [14873/18]

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

Driver Test Waiting Lists

376. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated waiting times and number of those waiting for a practical driver test by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14874/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The average waiting time for each driving test centre is available on the Road Safety Authority website at

This information is updated weekly.

The number of people waiting for a driving test is a matter for the Road Safety Authority. I have referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response is not received within 10 days.

Question No. 377 answered with Question No. 373.

Public Transport Fares

378. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if tax saver passes for public transport will be reviewed in view of the delays and overcrowding on the Luas line; if bearers of these tickets for rail services can be transferred for use on Bus Éireann as an interim measure until the delays and overcrowding issues on the Luas are resolved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14877/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, there have been issues with tram availability on the Green Line which are currently being addressed by the National Transport Authority (NTA) and Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII).

The wider issue raised by the Deputy is a matter for the NTA in conjunction with the relevant transport operator. In the context of the PSO contracts for the provision of transport services, I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Rail Network Expansion

379. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his Department has published a cost-benefit analysis of the cost of extending the DART service to Drogheda, as compared to the cost of upgrading the signalling system along this route and in Dublin city centre to facilitate an increase in the frequency of commuter rail service along this line; his plans to publish the analysis done on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14881/18]

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.

A business case - including a cost benefit analysis - was carried out on the DART Expansion Programme in 2015 by Aecom consultants for the NTA. The business case is available on the NTA website. A key element of the economic appraisal was a cost benefit analysis the results of which indicated a strong economic case for the DART Expansion Programme.

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 con-

necter 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 Deputies' questions to the Authority for further information on the issues raised. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Foster Care Supports

380. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the steps that will be taken to assist a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14805/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I wish to thank the Deputy for his question, and can confirm that I have referred the matter to Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, for their appropriate attention.

I have asked that they make contact with the person in question, and confirm to me when this action has occurred.

Departmental Staff Training

381. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the amount that her Department has spent on social media training and consultancy in each year since 2016. [14562/18]

382. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if training has been delivered in her Department on the use of social media (details supplied); the frequency and cost of this training; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14578/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 381 and 382 together.

In relation to my Department, I can confirm that the costs for the provision of social media training for staff development is as follows:

Year	Costs incurred by Department	Social Media Training Delivered	Number of staff attended
2017	€450	Social Media for Business	1
2017	€500	Social Media for Business	1
2018	€495	Social Media for Business	1

Child Protection

383. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her Department requires voluntary organisations that are in receipt of funding, for example, a youth organisation, to have a child protection officer and a child protection policy; the way in which this requirement is enforced; her views on whether it should exist; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14620/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Education and Training Boards (ETBs) act as grant administering bodies for the disbursement of funding under the various youth funding schemes. In this regard, earlier this year, officials from my Department corresponded with all ETBs requesting that each ETB seek a letter of assurance from each organisation in receipt of youth funding confirming that it is in compliance with the requirements of the Children First legislation.

The ETBs also have service level agreements (SLAs) in place with each funded youth organisation to facilitate the administration of funding. The SLA requires the Board of the youth organisation to appoint and maintain relevant officers as appropriate, including a designated child protection officer.

Departmental Contracts Data

384. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the value of contracts for services awarded to a company (details supplied) by her Department since 2010, in tabular form; and the type of work undertaken by the company. [14623/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I can confirm to the Deputy that no contracts were awarded by my Department in the years 2010 to date in respect of the company mentioned.

Early Years Strategy Publication

385. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of the early years strategy; the date by which this strategy will be published; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14863/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I have committed my Department to producing Ireland's first-ever National Early Years Strategy later this year.

Publication of the Strategy was identified as a key action in Better Outcomes Brighter Fu-

tures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People.

The development of the Strategy is being informed by national and international evidence on what makes most difference in helping to ensure that the early experiences of young children are positive. Consultation on the important issues that the strategy should address has been undertaken with young children as well as with representatives of key organisations and interest groups in the area. A further consultation event will take place in the coming months.

The National Early Years Strategy will focus on the period of early childhood, from birth to age five, and will cover all aspects of children's lives. The strategy will take a joined-up, cross-government approach to the issue of supporting children and their families during the early years.

The drafting of the Strategy is well advanced and discussions are taking place with colleagues across Government to progress its development. An Inter-Departmental Group has been convened to agree cross Departmental issues.

Development of the Strategy is a priority for me and for my Department, and I will move to publish the Strategy later this year.

EU Directives

386. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the EU directives that fall within her Department's remit not yet transposed into law; the deadline imposed by the EU for the transposition of same; the estimated date for transposition into law; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14864/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I can inform the Deputy, there are no EU directives as referred to in the question under my Department's remit.

Foster Care Policy

387. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her Department's criteria for sending children in foster care to another jurisdiction for psychiatric treatment; the types of treatments and cases that this is done for; and the reason this treatment is not delivered within the State. [14865/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I wish to thank the Deputy for her question, and can confirm that I have referred the matter to Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, for their direct reply.

School Completion Programme

388. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the cost of restoring the school completion programme to peak levels of funding; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14866/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As the Deputy may be aware, responsibility for the National Educational Welfare Board which included the School Completion Programme was transferred to my Department on its establishment in 2011.

Upon the establishment of Tusla, the Child and Family Agency on January 1st 2014, operational responsibility for the School Completion Programme was transferred to the Agency. The School Completion Programmes are funded in line with the academic year commencing in September each year. The funding available to the School Completion Programme for the school year 2017/2018 stands at €24.756m. An increase in funding of €6.24m per annum would be required to bring funding levels back to the pre 2011 funding level which stood at €31m.

Area Based Childhood Programme

389. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the future of the ABC programme; if this programme will be extended; and the way in which her Department plans to continue to meet the needs of the communities that this programme serves. [14867/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The ABC Programme commenced in 2013 and was designed as a time-bound, co-funding agreement led by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) in conjunction with The Atlantic Philanthropies (Atlantic), originally in the amount of €29.7m for the period 2013-2017. In late 2016, my Department secured additional funding to ensure that all 13 existing ABC sites remained in contract to the end of December 2017. As at December 2017, the total funding provided to the ABC Programme was €32.76 million (rounded). Of this, DCYA provided €17.91m and Atlantic provided €14.85m.

With the closure of The Atlantic Philanthropies operations in Ireland, DCYA is now the sole funder of the ABC Programme. In last year's budget, funding was secured to maintain the existing ABC Programme up to the end of 2018.

The ABC Programme is currently being evaluated at a national level, by the Centre for Effective Services (CES). Data has been collected locally, at the area-level, so as to assess the success and effectiveness of the totality of the investment across the five broad outcomes of the Programme (Improved Child Health and Development, Improved Children's Learning, Improved Parenting, Integrated Service Delivery, and Services embedded in mainstream services). The national evaluation report will be produced later in 2018. However, preliminary findings have been identified and a summary of these made available to the ABC sites.

In November 2017, my Department initiated a process, in consultation with key ABC Programme stakeholders, to consider options for sustaining the work of the ABC Programme within a new vision for a community based prevention and early intervention programme from 2019 and beyond. My Department is working to ensure that we take full account of the learning from all the interventions across the 13 ABC sites, and the national evaluation, in order to inform the delivery of prevention and early intervention initiatives, and to achieve our shared goal of improving the lives of children and families throughout Ireland.

A working group is currently being established to identify how the existing ABC Programme will transition into a new national structure that can build on the achievements to date and strengthen a future community based programme's focus on addressing child poverty and measurably improving specific outcomes for children and young people.

Area Based Childhood Programme

390. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the full year cost of operating each ABC centre since their establishment in tabular form; and if she will

make a statement on the matter. [14868/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Area Based Childhood (ABC) Programme is a joint prevention and early intervention initiative, led by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) in conjunction with The Atlantic Philanthropies (Atlantic). The aim of the ABC Programme is to test and evaluate prevention and early intervention approaches to improve outcomes for children and families living in 13 areas of disadvantage in Ireland.

The ABC Programme commenced in 2013 and was designed as a time-bound, co-funding agreement, originally in the amount of €29.7m for the period 2013-2017. In late 2016, my Department secured additional funding to ensure that all 13 existing ABC sites remained in contract to the end of December 2017. As at December 2017, the total funding provided to the ABC Programme was €32.76 million. Of this, DCYA provided €17.91m and Atlantic provided €14.85m.

With the closure of The Atlantic Philanthropies operations in Ireland, DCYA is now the sole funder of the ABC Programme. In last year's budget, funding was secured to maintain the existing ABC Programme up to the end of 2018.

Each ABC area was awarded a three year budget based on their original applications for a three year period of activity, ranging from programme design, through development and full implementation. The reported spending varied greatly from year to year, depending on which programmes an area was implementing, the scale of these, and at what stage of implementation the area was at in a given year, among other considerations.

The following table shows the amount of grant funding for the ABC Programme provided to each ABC area from 2013 to 2017.

ABC Area	ABC Contract Start	ABC Grant Funding 2013	ABC Grant Funding 2014	ABC Grant Funding 2015	ABC Grant Funding 2016	ABC Grant Funding 2017	Total ABC Grant Funding 2013-2017
Ballymun	01/01/2013	€500,000	€1,750,000	€1,750,000	€1,200,000	€431,155	€5,631,155
Tallaght West	01/01/2013	€406,674	€1,423,360	€1,423,360	€406,674	€1,071,971	€4,732,039
Dublin Northside (Darndale)	01/01/2013	€304,000	€1,198,550	€500,850	€767,800	€973,643	€3,744,843
Clondalkin	01/09/2014	-	€273,025	€382,235	€247,220	€372,851	€1,275,331
Louth	01/09/2014	-	€151,059	€755,295	€452,837	€452,379	€1,811,570
Dublin Docklands	08/09/2014	-	€120,000	€180,000	€660,000	€556,620	€1,516,620
Finglas	08/09/2014	-	-	€545,585	€424,344	€358,999	€1,328,928
Bray	01/12/2014	-	-	€209,500	€293,300	€335,200	€838,000
Knocknaheeny	01/01/2015	-	-	€450,000	€630,000	€720,000	€1,800,000
Grangegorman	01/01/2015	-	-	€235,207	€329,289	€457,988	€1,022,484
Ballyfermot	27/01/2015	-	-	€187,500	€412,500	€218,126	€818,126
Limerick	01/03/2015	-	-	€394,891	€552,847	€557,385	€1,505,123

Family Resource Centres

391. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the estimated cost of restoring funding for the family resource centres to peak funding levels; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14869/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Family Resource Centre Programme is administered by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. I have asked Tusla to respond directly to the Deputy's query with regard to the issue of funding.

Community Services Programme

392. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the estimated full year cost of matching the contribution to the community services programme to the national minimum wage rate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14725/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Community Services Programme (CSP) 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 CSP contribution is based on a 39-hour working week. It is not aligned to the national minimum wage, rather it is a fixed annual contribution that is required to be co-funded by the organisation concerned from other sources, for example, from income received from the public use of their facilities and services.

The allocation for the CSP in 2018 is €46.2m. It would cost an additional €3m annually to match the increase in the national minimum wage in 2018. There are no plans to seek an increase in programme funding for this purpose.

My Department plans to commence a review of the CSP later this year.

Departmental Staff Training

393. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the amount that his Department has spent on social media training and consultancy in each year since 2016. [14574/18]

394. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if training has been delivered in his Department on the use of social media (details supplied); the frequency and cost of this training; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14590/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I propose to take Questions Nos. 393 and 394 together.

My Department has not received any training in social media or used the services of any social media consultants since the date the Department was established on 19 July 2017.

Consultancy Contracts

395. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the value of contracts for services awarded to a company (details supplied) by his Department since 2010, in tabular form; and the type of work undertaken by the company. [14635/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): My Department has not used the services of the company in question since the date the Department was established, on 19 July 2017.

State Pensions

396. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 273 of 8 February 2018 and 539 of 20 February 2018, the way in which persons that were and or are engaged in a partnership agreement that are entitled to a pension payment as a result of Directive 2010/41/EU are notified of their right to claim a payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14506/18]

397. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 273 of 8 February 2018 and 539 of 20 February 2018, the sectors and or the nature of work in which a persons that were and or are engaged in a partnership agreement is in receipt of a pension as a result of Directive 2010/41/EU; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14507/18]

398. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the social protection benefits and payments that are applicable under Directive 2010/41/EU; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14508/18]

399. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 273 of 8 February 2018 and 539 of 20 February 2018, if the pension entitlement of those in partnership agreements has been adopted on a mandatory or voluntary basis; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14509/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 396 to 399, inclusive, together.

Entitlement to state pension (contributory) is assessed on the basis of an applicant's completed social insurance record and the eligibility conditions applicable on the date they reach pension age. It is not possible to determine a person's pension entitlement until a pension application is received in the Department from the individual, and their social insurance record is examined by a Deciding Officer.

My Department identifies customers who appear to have an entitlement to state pension (contributory), in advance of reaching pension age (currently 66 years of age), to invite them to make a timely application for pension. This customer service initiative is aimed at helping approx. 14,000 applicants annually to receive their pension entitlement by the due date (currently their 66th birthday) and minimise late applications for pension.

Applicants, who according to the social insurance records held by the Department appear to satisfy the minimum eligibility conditions for state pension (contributory), are invited to apply. Determining details include the applicant's name and address, (verified) dates of birth/death, date of entry into insurance and evidence of recent interaction with the Department. If the commercial partnership has been decided upon in advance of the customer's 66th birthday, they may be included in this invitation process. Social Welfare legislation stipulates that the onus is still on the customer to apply. On receipt of a completed application, the person's entitlement

to state pension (contributory) is examined by a Deciding Officer and the person is notified of the outcome.

The aim of Directive 2010/41/EU is to lay down a framework for Member States to put into effect the principle of equal treatment between men and women who are engaged in an activity in a self-employed capacity or who are contributing to the pursuit of such an activity.

The provisions of the Directive relevant to Social Welfare (Articles 7 and 8) require the provision of social protection benefits including maternity benefit, to spouses/civil partners who are not employees or business partners but who participate in the activities of their self-employed spouse/civil partner performing the same tasks or ancillary tasks.

The requirements of this Directive, other than articles 7 and 8, have been catered for in existing national legislation, e.g. the Employment Equality Act 2000, Equal Status Act 2000, Maternity Protection Act 1994 (as amended). No specific amendments were required to the existing provisions of these Acts in order to comply with the requirements of the Directive in these areas.

Under the current eligibility criteria, a person must have started paying social insurance before their 56th birthday and must have paid 10 years (520 paid contributions) in order to qualify for a contributory State pension. If Class S contributions only commenced on foot of this Directive a person will not qualify for a State pension until 2024 at the earliest. The Department only has information on whether a Class S contribution was paid on an earned or unearned basis and cannot analyse contributions by sector or nature of work.

The extension of social insurance to these spouses/civil partners means that they will be liable to pay PRSI contributions on their annual self-employed income provided it exceeds an annual insurability threshold of €5,000. The payment of these contributions will entitle these spouses/civil partners to access social insurance benefits currently available to other self-employed workers. The principal social insurance benefits to which self-employed workers can establish entitlement are widows, widowers or surviving civil partner's contributory pension, State pension contributory, maternity benefit, invalidity pension and treatment benefit which are required under the Directive.

The current system of social insurance operates on a mandatory basis only and does not provide for voluntary participation on the part of the contributors. Self-employed persons who earn €5,000 or more in a contribution year are liable for PRSI at the Class S rate of 4%, subject to a minimum payment of €500. The extension of social insurance to assisting spouses/civil partners can therefore only be on a mandatory basis.

Allowing participation on a voluntary basis could lead to the selection of bad risks and would undermine the social solidarity and contributory principles that underline the social insurance system.

The Deputy may wish to note that these provisions apply to spouse/civil partners who had previously been excluded from social insurance and apply regardless of the sector in which they operate. It therefore applies to all sectors of the economy, based on the circumstances of each individual "partnership" agreement.

Departmental Staff Training

400. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the amount that her Department has spent on social media training and consultancy in each

year since 2016. [14567/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Details of social media training commissioned by the Department in each year since 2016 are set out in the following table. There has been no social media consultancy during this period.

Social Media Training & Consultancy 2016

Date	Training Spend	Consultancy Spend	Total
Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil

Social Media Training & Consultancy 2017

Date	Training Spend	Consultancy Spend	Total
08/02/2017	€750.30	Nil	€750.30
19/05/2017	€553.50	Nil	€553.50
12/11/2017	€553.50	Nil	€553.50
Total			€1,857.30

Social Media Training & Consultancy 2018

Date	Training Spend	Consultancy Spend	Total
N/A	Nil	Nil	Nil

Departmental Staff Training

401. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if training has been delivered in her Department on the use of social media (details supplied); the frequency and cost of this training; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14583/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Details of social media training commissioned by the Department is set out in the following table.

In summary, social media training has been delivered to staff in the Department on three occasions during 2017. There has been no social media training so far in 2018.

Social Media Training

Date	Training Spend	Total
08/02/2017	€750.30	€750.30
19/05/2017	€553.50	€553.50
12/11/2017	€553.50	€553.50
		€1,857.30

Social Welfare Appeals

402. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14593/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer, having fully considered all of the available evidence including that adduced at the oral hearing, has decided to al-

low the appeal of the person concerned. The person concerned has been notified of the Appeals Officer's decision

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Consultancy Contracts

403. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the value of contracts for services awarded to a company (details supplied) by her Department since 2010, in tabular form; and the type of work undertaken by the company. [14628/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Our records indicate that no contracts have been awarded to this company by this Department.

Community Employment Schemes Supervisors

404. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on the need for community employment scheme supervisors to be provided with a pension scheme; the steps she has taken in this regard; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14685/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Community Employment (CE) scheme supervisors are employees of private companies in the community and voluntary sector. The State is not responsible for funding pension arrangements for such employees even where the companies in question are reliant on State funding. It is open to individuals to make provision for a pension by way of PRSA which all employers are obliged to facilitate.

However, it should be noted that the issue of CE supervisors' pension provision is currently being examined by a Community Sector High Level Forum, chaired by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. My Department is represented on this group, as are the unions, Pobal and other relevant Government Departments.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Overpayments

405. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 224 of 28 February 2018, the reason a person (details supplied) in Dublin 11 has had deductions applied to their social welfare payment; the reason a deduction was applied to the claimant's payment in view of the fact that an appeal was pending; if the deduction to the payment will be refunded in view of the appeal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14687/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned had deductions applied to a Jobseeker's Allowance payment on foot on an

overpayment of €8,303.30. The overpayment arose to means not having been fully disclosed. Deductions were in place from 13/6/2017 to 8/8/2017. The client then found work, leaving a balance of €8063.85 outstanding.

There was an additional overpayment of €128 arising from concurrent working and claiming on 29/6/2017 to 30/6/2017 with a current balance of €99.05.

Separate appeals against these overpayments were submitted in August and October 2017.

Although the client made a new claim for Jobseeker Allowance on 24/10/2017, arrangements were made that no further deductions would be made towards either overpayment pending the outcome of the client's appeals.

However, a deduction was taken towards one of the overpayments in January 2018 in error.

No further repayments will be deducted pending a decision of an Appeals Officer who will consider the client's appeal against the two overpayments. If the client is successful in either or both of her appeals, the relevant overpayments will be refunded and the overpayment will be removed from the client's record.

Social Insurance Data

406. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated full year cost of increasing all social insurance payments factoring into account increases announced in budget 2018 by €5, €10, €15, €20 and €25, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14726/18]

407. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated full year cost of increasing all social assistance payments factoring into account increases announced in budget 2018 by €5, €10, €15, €20 and €25, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14727/18]

408. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated full year cost of increasing the living alone allowance by €2 to €10, inclusive, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14728/18]

410. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated full year cost of increasing the fuel allowance by one to six weeks, inclusive; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14730/18]

414. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated full year cost of increasing the income thresholds for the working family payment by €5, €10, €15, €20 and €25; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14734/18]

416. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated cost of increasing the carer's support grant by €50, €100, €150, €200 and €250; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14736/18]

419. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the full year cost of the household benefits package; the estimated full year cost of increasing the monthly electricity allowance and the natural gas allowance by €5, €10 and €15, respectively; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14739/18]

420. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protec-

tion the estimated full year cost of increasing child benefit by €5, €10, €15, €20 and €25, respectively; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14740/18]

423. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated full year cost of extending the Christmas bonus to those in receipt of the invalidity pension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14743/18]

428. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated cost of increasing the disability allowance, carer’s allowance, blind pension and invalidity pension by €5, €10, €15 and €20; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14748/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 406 to 408, inclusive, 410, 414, 416, 419, 420, 423 and 428 together.

The costings sought by Deputy O’Dea are detailed in the following series of tables.

Table 1: Full year cost of varying increases in all weekly social insurance payments

-	€5 increase	€10 increase	€15 increase	€20 increase	€25 increase
Schemes	€m	€m	€m	€m	€m
Social Insurance Schemes	181.26	362.52	543.78	725.04	906.3

Table 2: Full year cost of varying increases in all weekly social assistance payments

-	€5 increase	€10 increase	€15 increase	€20 increase	€25 increase
Schemes	€m	€m	€m	€m	€m
Social Assistance Schemes	159.1	318.2	477.3	636.4	795.5

Table 3: Full year cost of increasing the Living Alone Allowance by varying amounts

Weekly Increase	Cost €m
€2.00	20.87
€3.00	31.31
€4.00	41.74
€5.00	52.18
€6.00	62.61
€7.00	73.05
€8.00	83.48
€9.00	93.92
€10.00	104.35

Table 4: Full year cost of increasing the duration of the Fuel Allowance by varying numbers of weeks

Number of weeks	Cost in 2019€m
1 week	8.58

Number of weeks	Cost in 2019€m
2 weeks	17.16
3 weeks	25.74
4 weeks	34.32
5 weeks	42.90
6 weeks	51.47

Table 5: Full year cost of increasing all of the weekly income thresholds for Working Family Payment by varying amounts

-	€5 increase	€10 increase	€15 increase	€20 increase	€25 increase
Scheme	€m	€m	€m	€m	€m
Working Family Payment	11.7	21.9	31.5	43.2	53.6

Table 6: Full year cost of increasing the Carer's Support Grant by varying amounts

Annual Increase	Cost in 2019€m
€50.00	5.63
€100.00	11.26
€150.00	16.89
€200.00	22.53
€250.00	28.16

Table 7: Full year cost of increasing the monthly electricity allowance and the natural gas allowance by varying amounts

-	Monthly Electricity Allowance		Monthly Natural Gas Allowance
Monthly Increase	Cost€m	Monthly Increase	Cost€m
€5.00	23.30	€5.00	2.84
€10.00	46.61	€10.00	5.68
€15.00	69.91	€15.00	8.52

The 2018 Revised Estimates for Public Services provides €246.8 million in 2018 for the household benefits package.

Table 8: Full year cost of increasing the monthly Child Benefit rate by varying amounts

-	€5 increase	€10 increase	€15 increase	€20 increase	€25 increase
Scheme	€m	€m	€m	€m	€m
Child Benefit	71.8	143.7	215.6	287.5	359.4

Table 9: Full year cost of increasing Disability Allowance, Carer's Allowance, Blind Pension and Invalidity Pension by varying amounts

Scheme	€5 increase €m	€10 increase €m	€15 increase €m	€20 increase €m
Disability Allowance	37.5	75.1	112.6	150.2
Carer's Allowance	10.9	21.8	32.6	43.5
Blind Pension	0.3	0.7	1.0	1.4
Invalidity Pension	17.2	34.3	51.5	68.6

An 85% Christmas Bonus was paid in December 2017 to over 1.2 million long-term social welfare recipients, including all recipients of invalidity pension. The cost of the Christmas Bonus paid to invalidity pension recipients is estimated at €11.1 million.

The costs shown above are on a full year basis and are based on the estimated number of recipients in 2018. It should be noted that these costings are subject to change in the context of emerging trends and associated revision of the estimated numbers of recipients for 2019. It should also be noted that these costings include proportionate increases for qualified adults and for those on reduced rates of payment, where relevant.

Telephone Support Allowance

409. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated full year cost of operating the weekly telephone support allowance; the estimated cost of increasing this allowance by €1, €1.50, €2 and €2.50; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14729/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The new weekly Telephone Support Allowance (TSA) of €2.50 will be paid from June 2018. People in receipt of the Living Alone Allowance and also Fuel Allowance will automatically qualify for the TSA. It is expected that approximately 124,176 customers will qualify for the scheme and the estimated full year cost is €16.14 million.

The estimated additional cost of increasing the TSA by €1.00, €1.50, €2.00 and €2.50 are set out in the following table. This estimate is based on 124,176 customers receiving the TSA.

Increase	Weekly TSA Rate Including Increase	Estimated Additional Cost of Yearly Increase
€1.00	€3.50	€6.458m
€1.50	€4.00	€9.688m
€2.00	€4.50	€12.912m
€2.50	€5.00	€16.14m

The primary objective of the TSA is to allow the most vulnerable people access to personal alarms or phones for security. The allowance will also encourage social contact and assist in the prevention of social isolation for those living alone.

The criteria for the TSA are framed in order to direct the limited resources available to my Department in as targeted a manner as possible. Fuel Allowance is a means tested payment ensuring that the TSA payment goes only to people on low income who live alone.

Any decision to increase the rate of TSA would considerably increase the overall cost of the scheme and would have to be considered in the context of overall budgetary negotiations.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 410 answered with Question No. 406.

Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance Scheme Data

411. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated full year cost of increasing the back to school clothing and footwear allowance by €5, €10 , €15, €20 and €25; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14731/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The back to school clothing and footwear allowance (BSCFA) scheme provides a once-off payment to eligible families to assist with the extra costs when children start school each autumn.

End of year records show that under the 2017 BSCFA scheme, payments were made to 151,000 families in respect of over 275,000 children at a cost of €49 million. The rate of payment in 2017 was increased by 25% to €125 in respect of children aged 4 to 11 and €250 for children aged 12 years and over in second level education.

Using the total number of children covered by the scheme in 2017 as a basis, the additional cost to increase the BSCFA rates by the amounts listed is set out in the attached tabular statement. Changes to increase the rate of payment of any scheme administered by my Department would have to be considered in a budgetary context.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Estimated Full -Year Additional Cost to Increase BSCFA rates by amounts listed:

Amount of increase	Cost
€5	€1,375,000
€10	€2,750,000
€15	€4,125,000
€20	€5,500,000
€25	€6,875,000

One-Parent Family Payment Data

412. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated full year cost of reversing changes made to the one-parent family payment in 2012; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14732/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The cost implications of reversing the changes made to the One-Parent Family Payment (OFP) in 2012 would be very complex to estimate and would require significant resources and time to prepare. In addition some of the impacts cannot be quantified.

There are three significant barriers to undertaking this costing exercise. Firstly, by reversing the amendments made to the OFP scheme, this could result in a cohort of lone parents that are currently not in receipt of a social welfare payment becoming eligible and therefore moving onto a social welfare payment. As members of this cohort are not currently in receipt of any social welfare payment, the Department currently has no visibility of them and therefore it would be impossible to accurately estimate the numbers involved.

Secondly, this proposal may incentivise some customers to move from alternative payments such as Jobseekers Allowance (JA), the Jobseeker’s Transitional Payment (JST) and the Back

to Work Family Dividend (BTWFD) back onto the OFP. Again, it would not be possible for the Department to estimate the magnitude of this flow between schemes.

Finally, reversing the changes to the OFP scheme would also increase the incidence of dual payments of OFP and the Working Family Payment (WFP) – formerly the Family Income Supplement – which would lead to significant but unquantifiable reductions in FIS payments for some lone parents.

These unknown factors are critical to providing a reliable costing. Therefore, as has been previously indicated to the Deputy, the Department is not in a position to provide the costing requested.

Social Insurance Fund Data

413. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated full year cost of extending jobseeker’s payments to the self-employed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14733/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The issue of extending additional social insurance benefits to the self-employed paying class S PRSI was considered in the Actuarial Review of the Social Insurance fund (SIF) as at 31 December, 2015, which I published on 18 October 2017. The review, required by legislation, was carried out by independent consultants, KPMG. It examines the projected income and expenditure of the SIF over the course of the 55 year period from 2016 to 2071.

The review found that the fund currently has a modest surplus of income over expenditure. In 2016 there was a surplus of €0.4 billion on expenditure of €8.8 billion and receipts of €9.2 billion. However, this will reduce over the next two years and will return to a small shortfall in 2020. The annual shortfalls are projected to increase from 2021 onwards as the ageing of the population impacts. Projections indicate that, in the absence of further action to tackle the shortfall, the excess of expenditure over income of the fund will increase significantly over the medium to long term. The shortfall in expenditure over income is projected to increase from €0.2 billion in 2020 to €3.3 billion by 2030 and to €22.2 billion by 2071. It should be noted that as self-employed workers were to be eligible to apply for invalidity pension from December 2017, the cost of this introduction has been factored into the actuarial review’s findings.

As part of the review the independent consultants were required to project the additional PRSI expenditure if invalidity pension and illness, jobseeker’s and carer’s benefits were extended to class S self-employed workers and the PRSI contribution rates required to provide these benefits on a revenue neutral basis.

The review found that the combined cost of introducing the invalidity, illness, jobseeker’s and carer’s benefits for class S contributions is estimated to be €118 million in 2018, rising steadily to €223 million in 2020. By 2025 the projected cost is €413 million and, over the period of the review the cost would rise to €1.3 billion in 2071.

As outlined in the table below the cost of introducing jobseeker’s benefit for class S contributions is estimated to be €45 million in 2018, rising steadily to €60 million in 2020. By 2025 the projected cost is €81 million and, over the period of the review the cost would rise to €185 million in 2071.

The review indicates that, where these benefits are extended to the self-employed, the class S rate of PRSI contribution would need to increase substantially in order to ensure that the

benefits are delivered in a revenue neutral manner. It estimates that when expenditure on the additional benefits is considered over the entire projection period, PRSI rates would need to increase by 94% under a scenario of no subvention from the exchequer. This is equivalent to an increase of the Class S contribution rate from the current 4% rate to 7.8%.

This increased contribution is attributable to the costs of extending these additional benefits to PRSI class S contributors. It does not take account of the value to PRSI class S contributors of access to the range of existing benefits, and in particular State pension contributory. The consultants estimated that the typical cost of State pension (contributory) on its own is of the order of 10% to 15%, depending on other factors including rate of average earnings and date of commencing paying PRSI. Adding in the other benefits referenced the total class S rate of contribution to ensure revenue neutrality would be of the order of 20% per annum.

Year	Projected costs of extending Invalidity, Illness, Job-seekers Benefit, Carer's Benefit	Projected costs of extending Invalidity, Illness, Job-seekers Benefit, Carer's Benefit	Projected costs of extending Invalidity, Illness, Job-seekers Benefit, Carer's Benefit	Projected costs of extending Invalidity, Illness, Job-seekers Benefit, Carer's Benefit	Projected costs of extending Invalidity, Illness, Job-seekers Benefit, Carer's Benefit
	Invalidity	Illness	Jobseeker's	Carer's	Total
2015 (act)	0	0	0	0	0
2016	0	0	0	0	0
2017	3	0	0	0	3
2018	30	40	45	2	118
2019	59	54	58	3	173
2020	87	72	60	4	223
2021	125	88	63	5	281
2022	152	94	67	5	317
2023	176	99	71	5	351
2024	198	104	75	6	382
2025	218	108	81	6	413
2030	338	143	91	8	579
2035	429	172	103	10	714
2040	496	198	112	12	817
2045	551	222	123	14	910
2050	537	223	125	15	899
2055	563	237	134	16	950
2060	601	256	144	17	1,018
2065	665	282	158	19	1,124
2070	775	322	179	21	1,297
2071	800	331	185	21	1,337

Additional Projected expenditure (€ millions) on various benefit types where extended to class S (Actuarial Review as at 31/12/15)

The Actuarial Review provides government with a timely and evidence-led opportunity to undertake a full review of our social insurance system and to consult with stakeholders. The

review will take account of the financial sustainability of the Fund given the expected demographic challenges and consideration of extending the scope of benefits for workers generally, including the self-employed.

Question No. 414 answered with Question No. 406.

One-Parent Family Payment Data

415. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated cost of increasing the income disregard for those in receipt of the one-parent family payment by €5, €10, €15, €20 and €25; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14735/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The estimated costings provided in tabular form below are based on the existing profile of recipients of the One-Parent Family Payment as of January 2018 and assume that the Budget 2018 increases due from 29 March have taken effect.

These estimates do not take into account potential behavioural changes which would arise from the implementation of increases to the earnings disregard, in particular any potential inflows into the scheme.

Increase OFP earnings disregard by:	Approximate cost to the Exchequer in a full year
€5 a week (to €135 a week)	€1.4 million
€10 a week (to €140 a week)	€2.9 million
€15 a week (to €145 a week)	€4.3 million
€20 a week (to €150 a week)	€5.7 million
€25 a week (to €155 a week)	€7.1 million

Question No. 416 answered with Question No. 406.

State Pensions Payments

417. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated full year cost of reinstating the State transition pension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14737/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2011 provided that State pension age will be increased gradually to 68 years. This began in January 2014 with the abolition of the State pension (transition) which was available to people aged 65 who satisfied the qualifying conditions. This measure standardised the State pension age for all at 66 years. This will increase to 67 in 2021 and to 68 in 2028.

We are all aware that people are living for much longer. Life expectancy at birth has increased significantly over the years – and is now at 78.4 years for men and 82.8 years for women. This is very positive. As a result of this demographic change, the number of State pension recipients is increasing year on year. This has significant implications for the future costs of State pension provision which are currently increasing by roughly €1 billion every 5 years. The

purpose of changes to the State pension age is to make the pension system more sustainable in the context of increasing life expectancy. This sustainability is vital, if the current workers, who fund State pension payments through their PRSI, are to receive a pension themselves when they reach retirement age.

In 2013, the cost of the State pension (transition) was €137 million. Its abolition was not expected to save that amount of expenditure in full, as some people who were affected would alternatively claim working age payments such as Jobseeker's Benefit (although at a lower rate than the rate of the State pension), or claim an Increase for a Qualified Adult in respect of their spouse's pension.

However, it is anticipated that well over half of that cost has been saved each year as a result of this measure, and this would be expected to increase as (a) the number of 65 year olds increases, (b) the change results in a higher percentage of people working while aged 65, and (c) there have been a number of Budget increases in the rate of the State pension since then. It is estimated that the net saving in 2017 is likely to be in the region of over €80 million, and this is expected to increase over time.

The Deputy should note that there is no legally mandated retirement age in the State, and the age at which employees retire is a matter for the contract of employment between them and their employers. While such a contract may have been entered into with a retirement date of 65, in the context of the previous State pension arrangements, there is no legal impediment to the employer and employee agreeing to increase the duration of employment for one or more years, if both parties wish to do so.

Where this is not possible, there are specific measures which apply to someone claiming Jobseeker's Benefit from a date after their 65th birthday. Where qualified, these recipients may continue to be eligible for that payment until reaching pension age.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Bereavement Grant

418. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated full year cost of reinstating the bereavement grant at a rate of €850; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14738/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): During the economic downturn, my Department protected primary social welfare rates and in recent years, as the economy recovered, the Government has concentrated resources in improving the core rates of payments, particularly for pensioners. Abolishing the bereavement grant provided a significant annual saving and allowed my Department to protect other core social welfare payments such as the State pension.

The number of bereavement grant claims in 2013 was 23,716, and this represented an increase of approximately 4% on 2012. Based on a similar yearly increase each year since 2013, it is estimated that the number of bereavement grant claims that might arise in 2019, were the scheme to be re-introduced, would be in the region of 30,008, and the number would be expected to increase in future years. Accordingly, if there were 30,008 such grants made in 2019, at a rate of €850 each, the cost would be approx. €25.51 million.

Any decision to reinstate the Bereavement Grant would have to be considered in the context of overall budgetary negotiations.

It's worth noting that there are a range of supports available for people following bereavement which provide more significant support than the grant. These include weekly paid widow's, widower's or surviving civil partner's (contributory and non-contributory) pensions, which are based on contributions or a means test, and a once-off widowed or surviving civil partner grant of €6,000 where there is a dependent child. A number of social welfare payments, including State pension, continue in payment for six weeks following a death. In Budget 2016, the Government increased the payment after death period to 12 weeks for carer's allowance. Guardian payments are available where someone cares for an orphaned child. A special funeral grant of €850 is paid where a person dies because of an accident at work or occupational disease.

Under the SWA scheme, the Department of Social Protection may make a single exceptional needs payment (ENP) to help meet essential, once-off expenditure which a person could not reasonably be expected to meet from their weekly income, which may include help with funeral and burial expenses."

In 2017, some 2,800 ENPs were awarded to assist with funerals and burial expenses at a cost of €5.1 million.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Questions Nos. 419 and 420 answered with Question No. 406.

Maternity Benefit Data

421. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated full year cost of increasing maternity benefit by one, two, three, four, five and six weeks, respectively; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14741/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Maternity Benefit is paid by my Department to employed and self-employed mothers who are on maternity leave and is based on the payment of PRSI contributions while working. The current entitlement to paid maternity leave is 26 weeks. The 2018 estimates for my Department provide for expenditure of nearly €264 million.

The estimated additional cost of extending the duration of maternity benefit is approximately €9.6 million for each extra week, at the rate of €240 per week. The table below estimates the cost of increasing the duration for which maternity benefit is paid by one to six weeks.

It should be noted that Budget 2018 provided for the rate of maternity benefit to be increased by €5 per week from 26 March 2018.

These estimates are based on the cost for a full year and assume that any increase in duration is implemented from the beginning of the year.

Estimated annual cost of increasing the duration of maternity benefit based on budget 2018 rate of €240

No. of additional weeks	Estimated cost (€m)
1	9.6
2	19.2
3	28.8
4	38.4
5	48.0

No. of additional weeks	Estimated cost (€m)
6	57.6

This costing is subject to change in the context of emerging trends and associated revision of the estimated numbers of recipients for 2018. It should be noted that the birth rate has continued to fall year on year. It should also be noted that there are additional costs to the Exchequer as these estimates do not include the costs of salary top-ups for public/civil servants.

Paternity Benefit

422. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated full year cost of increasing paternity benefit by one, two, three, four, five and six weeks, respectively; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14742/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Paternity Benefit is a payment for employed and self-employed people who are on paternity leave from work and covered by social insurance (PRSI). It is paid for 2 weeks and is available for any child born or adopted on or after 1 September 2016. The 2018 Estimates for my Department provide for expenditure of nearly €16 million.

The estimated additional cost of extending the duration of paternity benefit is approximately €5.2 million for each extra week. The table below estimates the additional cost of increasing the duration of paternity benefit above its current 2 week duration at the current weekly rate of €240. It should be noted that Budget 2018 provided for the weekly rate of payment to be increased by €5 per week to €240 from 26 March 2018.

Estimated annual cost of increasing the duration of Paternity Benefit based on 2018 rates	
No. of additional weeks	Estimated cost (€m)
1	5.2
2	10.4
3	15.6
4	20.8
5	26.0
6	31.2

These estimates are based on the cost for a full year and assume that any increase in duration is implemented from the beginning of the year.

It should be noted that this costing is subject to change in the context of emerging trends and associated revision of the estimated numbers of recipients for 2018. It should also be noted that there are also costs to the Exchequer as these estimates do not include the costs of salary top-ups for public/civil servants.

Question No. 423 answered with Question No. 406.

Free Travel Scheme Data

424. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the full year cost of operating the free travel scheme; the estimated cost of increasing ex-

penditure by 10%; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14744/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The 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 over 80 private transport operators. There are currently approx. 904,000 customers with direct eligibility. The scheme is available to all people aged over 66 living permanently in the State. To qualify for the scheme, applicants who are under age 66 must be in receipt of a qualifying payment. These are invalidity pension, blind pension, disability allowance, carer's allowance or an equivalent social security payment from a country covered by EC Regulations or one with which Ireland has a Bilateral Social Security Agreement.

In order to maintain service at existing levels, and to facilitate new entrants/services to the scheme, funding to the free travel scheme was increased by €10 million in Budget 2018, an increase of 12.5%.

The estimated expenditure on free travel in 2018 is €90 million. To increase the cost by 10% would require an additional €9 million bringing the total expenditure for the scheme up to €99 million.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Reasonable Accommodation Fund Data

425. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the expenditure on the reasonable accommodation fund in each of the years 2012 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14745/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The reasonable accommodation fund assists employers to take appropriate measures to enable a person with a disability/impairment to have access to employment by providing a range of grants. These grants and supports include the workplace equipment adaptation grant, the personal reader grant, the job interview interpreter grant and the employee retention grant.

The purpose of the scheme is to assist unemployed people with disabilities to gain access to the open labour market by providing grants for "reasonable accommodations" in the private sector and to support private sector employers in the employment of people with disabilities.

The reasonable accommodation fund is a demand-led scheme in that expenditure arises in response to applications received. The actual expenditure on this fund is set out in the following table.

Table: Expenditure on the Reasonable Accommodation Fund for People with Disabilities

Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018*
Workplace equipment and adaptation grant	€71,176	€81,724	€61,776	€58,108	€54,041	€69,254	€15,994
Personal reader grant	€27,274	€27,526	€14,499	€11,866	€16,537	€31,619	€1,816
Job interview interpreter grant	€6,355	€2,767	€1,589	€3,950	€7,244	€5,714	€601

Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018*
Employee retention grant	€4,320	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0
Total	€109,125	€112,017	€77,864	€73,925	€77,822	€106,587	€18,411

* 1 January 2018 – 28 March 2018

I hope this clarifies the issue for the Deputy.

Departmental Staff Training

426. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if all Intreo staff have received disability awareness training; the estimated cost of training staff which have not yet undergone such training; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14746/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection fully recognises the need to support staff and promote disability awareness and has been very proactive in the provision of training and supports in this area in recent years, with a very positive response from staff.

The Department supports its staff by offering a suite of disability awareness training including Mental Health and Deaf Awareness, Dealing with Blind Customers and general Disability Awareness. The Department also offers courses in SafeTALK suicide awareness, ASIST suicide prevention and Stress Awareness. These are available to all staff in the Department, including staff in Intreo Centres. Since 2013, over 2,900 staff have attended training courses in these areas. In addition, e-learning courses developed for front line public servants by the National Disability Authority (NDA) and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) are freely available online to all staff via the Department’s Staff Development intranet site. Bespoke, ad hoc training can also be procured where required utilising an External Training Budget.

In conjunction with Mental Health Ireland (MHI) and the Civil Service Employee Assistance Service (CSEAS), Mental Health Awareness workshops have been held in a variety of locations since 2013. The workshops provided tools and strategies to enhance mental health and well-being, increase awareness and understanding, and promote the range of formal and informal supports and resources available.

My Department has a dedicated Disability Liaison Officer (DLO) to support our staff with disabilities and their managers. The DLO offers support and promotes awareness of disability issues and services amongst staff, while also facilitating the Department’s active participation in the Irish Association for Supported Employment’s Job Shadow Initiative and AHEAD’s Willing Able Mentoring Programme. This Officer has attended AsIAM Public Sector Training Programme on Autism-Friendly Practices, NDA Seminar on “Alternative & Inclusive Routes to Employment for People with Disabilities” and NCBI Seminar on “Bridging the Information Gap” and has disseminated information from these sources to Departmental staff. The Department also provides translation, interpretive and Irish Sign Language services as required and is committed to the provision of information in alternative formats where feasible, as outlined in our Customer Charter.

Induction and Orientation training highlights the range of Departmental supports and grant-aid available for both staff and clients with disabilities. These include employment supports for jobseekers with disabilities such as the Wage Subsidy Scheme, EmployAbility Services and

the Reasonable Accommodation Fund, in addition to the Civil Service Employee Assistance Service (CSEAS).

During 2016, in the context of Departmental commitments under Pathways to Work 2016-2020 to extend and intensify proactive engagement with people with a disability, 67 dedicated Case Officers were nominated across the Intreo network. My Department's Staff Development Unit provided a Disability Awareness Seminar in March 2016 for these Case Officers, with speakers from the National Disability Authority and Epilepsy Ireland. This was supplemented by tailored instructor-led training nationally in Employment Supports for People with Disabilities and this curriculum is now incorporated as standard into an accredited programme for Case Officers, Level 8 Certificate in Professional Practice in Employability Services, in conjunction with the National College of Ireland (NCI).

Ongoing liaison, via the Department's Disability & Illness Policy Unit, with the National Disability Authority (NDA) and the Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI) ensures that information on relevant events and seminars is communicated to Departmental staff.

The Department will continue with its extensive training and awareness in this area. It is estimated that the cost of providing disability awareness training to all staff in Intreo Centres in the Department would be approximately €90,000.

Partial Capacity Benefit Scheme Data

427. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated full year cost of extending the wage subsidy scheme for those in receipt of partial capacity benefit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14747/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The partial capacity benefit (PCB) scheme is designed for people who are on illness benefit, for at least six months, or on invalidity pension and who have retained some capacity for work and wish to work. If awarded, PCB will allow them to continue to receive, in addition to their earnings from employment, a percentage of their illness benefit or invalidity pension payment while working.

The wage subsidy scheme (WSS) is an employment support to private sector employers, the objective of which is to encourage employers to employ people with disabilities and thereby increase the numbers of people with disabilities participating in the open labour market. The scheme provides financial incentives to private sector employers to hire people with a disability for between 21 and 39 hours per week under a contract of employment.

Extending eligibility for the WSS to employers who employ people in receipt of PCB is estimated to cost about €3 million in a full year. The costing here relates to projected new PCB participants only, as a WSS payment can only be made where an individual is entering a new job or is in that job for less than 12 months.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 428 answered with Question No. 406.

Departmental Staff Data

429. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protec-

tion the number of staff working in the social welfare appeals office; the estimated full year cost of increasing the number of staff by 10%; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14749/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): There are currently 82 staff (78.05 full-time equivalent) working in the Social Welfare Appeals Office.

The full year cost of increasing the staff complement by 10% would amount to approximately €375,000.

Unemployment Data

430. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of jobless households here; the way in which the rate of jobless households compares to the EU average; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14750/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): According to the Eurostat Labour Force Survey, in 2016 there were 170.76 million households in the EU (excluding households composed solely of students or solely of inactive people aged 65 and over). Of these, some 29.49 million households (17.3% of the total) were jobless - that is, no adult in the household was working.

For Ireland, the total number of relevant households was 1,440,600, and of these some 253,000 (17.6% of the total) were jobless.

Although the figure for Ireland has fallen from a high of 23% in 2012 as a result of the economic recovery, government remains concerned about aspects of household joblessness that go beyond the standard measures of unemployment and receipt of jobseekers’ payments. Relevant groups, not normally considered to be unemployed, include economically inactive lone parents, people with disabilities, and the adult dependants of unemployed people, all of whom might benefit from closer attachment to employment and the labour market. A range of policy reforms has been taken affecting these groups, and further reforms were considered in consultation with representative bodies for those involved. These policy developments are set out in the Pathways to Work Action Plan for Jobless Households which I published on 25, September 2017. Development of the Action Plan fulfils a commitment in the Programme for Government and in the overall Pathways to Work 2016-2020 strategy. It also responds to concerns about the level of household joblessness raised in Country-Specific Recommendations to Ireland by the EU.

The Action Plan for Jobless Households is an example of one of the many measures that Government is implementing, with a view to assisting people and families to become work ready and gain employment. The Plan aims to extend activation services to people who are not working, but are not defined as unemployed by traditional measures. It focuses in particular on improving employment rates of households with children – both the traditional ‘nuclear’ family and the lone parent family. A number of key policy initiatives to achieve that goal are identified as follows:

- Extend active engagement with the Intreo employment service to additional groups of economically inactive working age adults
- Improve incentives and remove barriers for people transitioning from welfare to employment

- Pilot a family focused case management approach in five geographical areas to improve employment rates and reduce joblessness in households across Ireland.

Progress against each of the reform actions and milestones will be monitored and reported on quarterly to the Cabinet Committee on the Economy and Jobs. Implementation of these policy measures should see the level of joblessness fall more rapidly than is already anticipated over the next few years. These targets are in addition to the existing Pathways to Work targets 2020 – bringing unemployment down to between 5% and 6%, bringing long-term unemployment below 2.5%, and bringing youth unemployment below 12%.

The Action Plan for Jobless Households aims to identify and remove barriers that are currently preventing people from getting a fair chance, thus building a Republic of Opportunity for all.

Employment Investment Incentive Scheme Data

431. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons that have been subject to sanctions for non-compliance or non-engagement with her Department in each of the years 2011 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14751/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Penalty rates were introduced as a means of encouraging jobseekers to engage with activation measures and co-operate with efforts of the Department to assist them in securing employment. The Department is committed, under Pathways to Work, to incentivise the take-up of activation opportunities, including implementing sanctions for failure to engage.

The legislation underpinning the application of penalty rates is provided for in Social Welfare legislation. The application of the penalty provisions can only be applied in specific circumstances and the decision to impose a penalty can only be made by a Deciding Officer of the Department. If dissatisfied with that decision it is open to the Jobseeker to appeal to the Social Welfare Appeals Office.

Details of the numbers of penalty rates applied in the specific years up to end February 2018, as sought by the Deputy, can be found in the table.

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total:
PR	359	1,519	3,395	5,325	6,743	10,867	16,451	3,014	47,673

Child Poverty

432. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the target for child poverty; the likelihood of the target being reached within the set time-frame; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14752/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People (Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures), published by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs in 2014, includes a target to reduce by two-thirds the number of children in consistent poverty in 2011 by 2020. Meeting this target means lifting almost 95,000 children out of poverty.

Under the BOBF Framework, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, in collabora-

tion with my Department and other relevant Departments, is taking a whole-of-government approach to tackling child poverty, building on the lifecycle approach in the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (NAPinclusion) and informed by the European Commission Recommendation on ‘Investing in children: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage’.

2015 saw the first reduction in the number of children in consistent poverty since 2008. Compared to 2014, in 2015 there was a 13,000 decrease, or approximately 9 per cent, in the number of children in consistent poverty. This downward trend continued in 2016. The full impact of the economic recovery is not yet reflected in these figures. The monthly unemployment rate in January 2018 announced by the CSO was 6.1%, down from a peak of 15% in 2012. As unemployment is strongly linked to poverty, we can expect further decreases in poverty as the figures for 2017 and 2018 become available. The Government continues to focus on activation, to help people back into the workforce.

To give some perspective and a sense of the size of the challenge Ireland faces in trying to achieve the child poverty target: at the height of the economic boom in 2008, when the consistent poverty rate for children was its lowest, there were 68,000 children in consistent poverty. So, in order to meet the target, Ireland will have to be more than twice as effective as our best ever performance to date.

Social transfers play a crucial role in alleviating poverty and inequality and Ireland is among the best in the EU for reducing poverty through social transfers. In 2016 Social transfers reduce the at-risk-of-poverty rate for children from 40.5 per cent to 18.9 per cent, a poverty reduction effect of 53.3 per cent

However, reducing child poverty is not just about income supports and welfare. Rather it is also about supporting parents to make the transition into employment and assisting families through the provision of quality affordable services in areas such as education, health and child-care.

Social Welfare Appeals Data

433. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of social welfare appeals lodged in each of the years 2012 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; the percentage of appeals which were successful; the average waiting time in these years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14753/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The following tables provide the details which have been requested by the Deputy for the years 2012 to 2017 and to the end of February 2018.

The figures provided in the tables for appeals which had a favourable outcome for the appellant relate to appeals which were either allowed in full or in part by an Appeals Officer, or which were resolved by way of a revised decision in favour of the appellant by a Deciding Officer/Designated Person.

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.

There are a number of reasons why a decision which was refused at first instance might be successful on appeal and it is not necessarily the case that the first decision was incorrect. It is often the case that new evidence is provided with an appeal and that, as a result, the original de-

cision may be revised by the Deciding Officer or Designated Person. This was the case in 37.1 per cent of favourable appeal outcomes in 2016 , 37.6 per cent of favourable appeal outcomes in 2017 and 39.8% of favourable appeals to date in 2018.

Where the decision was not revised by the Department in light of the appeal contentions, further evidence is often provided by the appellant as the appeal process proceeds and in addition, the Appeals Officer may gain insights when they meet the appellant in person at oral hearing which may influence the outcome of the appeal.

The time taken to process an appeal reflects all aspects of the appeal process including the time spent in the Department preparing the appeal submission. The quasi-judicial nature of the system impacts on appeal processing times which are proportionate to the complexity of many of the issues under appeal which often require a high level of judgement, in addition to the need to ensure due process and natural justice.

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.

Appeal Receipts and Percentage of Favourable Decisions of Appeals Finalised 2012 – 2018

Year	Appeal Receipts	Appeals Finalised	Favourable Decisions	Appeals Disallowed	Withdrawn
2012	35,484	32,558	50.4%	42.6%	7.0%
2013	32,777	38,421	55.0%	39.0%	6.0%

Year	Appeal Receipts	Appeals Finalised	Favourable Decisions	Appeals Disallowed	Withdrawn
2014	26,069	31,211	56.5%	37.7%	5.8%
2015	24,475	25,406	58.8%	36.1%	5.1%
2016	22,461	23,220	59.2%	35.9%	4.9%
2017	19,658	18,980	60.1%	33.9%	6.0%
2018 (to 28/2/2018)	3,272	2,910	57.9%	37.0%	5.1%

Appeal Processing Times 2012– 2018

Year	Average processing times (weeks) Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks) Oral Hearings
2012	27.8	39.5
2013	25.8	33.9
2014	21.1	28.6
2015	18.1	25.5
2016	17.6	24.1
2017	19.8	26.4
2018 (to 28 February 2018)	25.2	30.0

Poverty Data

434. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the target for poverty here; the likelihood of the target being reached within the set timeframe; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14754/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The national social target for poverty reduction agreed by Government in 2012 is to reduce consistent poverty from 6.3% in 2010 to 4% by 2016 and to 2% or less by 2020. This was an ambitious target, particularly during a time of economic recession, but one to which the Government has remained committed.

Data from the CSO Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) indicate that consistent poverty rose sharply after 2010, to a peak of 9.1% in 2013. The latest SILC 2016 data, released by the CSO in December 2017, indicate that this had reduced to 8.3%. A reduction of 6 percentage points would now be required to meet the 2020 poverty target.

The impact of the recovery is not yet fully reflected in these most recent data, which reflect income conditions in 2015-2016. Macro-economic and labour market indicators have shown continued economic and employment growth since then. Unemployment has fallen from 9.4% in mid-2015 to 6% in February 2018. The number of people in receipt of working-age income and employment supports has also continued to fall.

In addition, Budget 2018 introduced increases in a range of supports including €5 per week increases in the maximum weekly rate for working-age people and young jobseekers and for pensioners, with proportionate increases for adult dependents and an increase of €2 per child per week for qualified child dependents. These increases will assist those individuals and families who are most in need.

Given the continuing economic recovery and measures introduced in Budgets 2017 and

2018, I expect the figures for 2017 and 2018, when they become available, to show further improvement over the 2016 outcomes. I will continue to work with my Government colleagues to ensure that the economic recovery is experienced in all regions and by all families, households and individuals.

The Government's strategy for addressing poverty and social exclusion is set out in the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion. The Plan identifies a wide range of targeted actions and interventions to achieve the overall objective of reducing consistent poverty. Under the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People (Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures), the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, in collaboration with my Department and other relevant Departments, is taking a whole-of-government approach to tackling child poverty, building on the lifecycle approach in the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (NAPinclusion) and informed by the European Commission Recommendation on 'Investing in children: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage'.

My Department is currently reviewing the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (NAPinclusion), and is developing a new plan for the period 2018-2021. As part of this update, the Department is also reviewing the national social target for poverty reduction. This review is being undertaken in consultation with relevant stakeholders.

Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

435. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the amount spent by her Department on external consultant reports from May 2016 to date in 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14755/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The information requested by the Deputy is currently being compiled by my officials and will be provided to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

436. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when the refusal on appeal for carer's allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) will be examined; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14804/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer having fully considered all the available evidence, including that adduced at oral hearing, disallowed the appeal of the person concerned. Notification of the Appeals Officer's decision issued to the person concerned on 20th March 2018.

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 (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 the Appeals Officer in the light of new evidence or new facts.

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If there is any new evidence or new facts pertinent to this case that were not brought to the attention of the Appeals Officer during the determination of the appeal, they may be submitted to this office for consideration.

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.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Rent Supplement Scheme Applications

437. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when rent support will be offered in the case a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14806/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned has been in receipt of rent supplement since 1/4/11 and all payments have been issued to-date.

To ensure the rate of rent supplement entitlement is accurately assessed, the person concerned was requested to provide the Department with a SWA 3A Rent Supplement Review Form and verification of income. On receipt of same, the rent supplement claim for the person concerned will be re-assessed.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Fuel Allowance Applications

438. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when fuel allowance will be made available in the case of persons (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14815/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): An application for fuel allowance was received from the person concerned on 12 March 2018.

Fuel allowance is a means-tested payment to assist householders on long-term social welfare payments towards the cost of their heating needs. It is not intended to meet those costs in full. One allowance is payable per household.

The main eligibility conditions that apply to the fuel allowance scheme are that a person must be in receipt of a qualifying payment, must satisfy a means test and must either be living alone or with other qualifying persons. An applicant may have a combined household income of up to €100.00 per week over and above the maximum rate of state pension (contributory) and increase for qualified adult.

Entitlement to the fuel allowance will be assessed and the person concerned will be notified in writing of the outcome as soon as possible.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Farm Assist Scheme Applications Data

439. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of recipients of farm assist; the amount paid by county in each of the years 2010 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14846/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The information requested (where available) by the Deputy is detailed in the following tabular statement.

Recipients of Farm Assist by County at the end of December in the years 2010 to 2017 and at the end of February 2018

Year	February 2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
Carlow	56	60	58	69	76	75	84	95	102
Cavan	242	254	265	300	326	344	404	407	401
Clare	342	346	400	455	521	566	609	643	637
Cork	529	542	606	689	788	840	922	957	917
Donegal	1,140	1,265	1,294	1,299	1,458	1,492	1,534	1,491	1,389
Dublin	27	27	33	30	32	28	37	35	11
Galway	702	714	767	858	1,000	1,035	1,112	1,137	1,133
Kerry	602	523	568	717	721	766	818	819	742
Kildare	21	21	19	28	37	39	53	53	56
Kilkenny	86	86	91	108	120	128	146	154	173
Laois	82	85	94	104	116	128	158	177	149
Leitrim	304	301	331	366	377	396	394	377	331
Limerick	145	139	164	180	216	231	250	247	265
Longford	128	130	139	177	205	232	260	258	176
Louth	60	60	59	72	82	79	87	84	81
Mayo	1,115	1,156	1,289	1,471	1,614	1,691	1,813	1,869	1,684
Meath	45	49	55	67	81	81	93	82	90
Monaghan	307	319	344	386	446	468	504	545	516
Offaly	71	72	76	89	97	107	130	133	127
Roscommon	256	262	276	319	356	384	424	433	407
Sligo	208	210	228	251	283	283	310	315	478
Tipperary	241	252	269	300	336	363	404	402	350
Waterford	60	61	64	70	78	85	92	96	84
Westmeath	97	99	120	131	153	166	197	193	134
Wexford	152	151	166	195	223	224	248	255	202
Wicklow	50	50	53	59	67	72	79	76	79
Total	7,068	7,234	7,828	8,790	9,809	10,303	11,162	11,333	10,714

Expenditure on Farm Assist 2010 to 2017 and to end February 2018

€000	€000	€000	€000	€000	€000	€000	€000	€000
11,686	78,182	78,832	88,487	93,632	99,178	108,170	113,724	110,931

Farm Assist Scheme

440. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social

Protection the estimated cost of a proposal (details supplied) over a calendar year. [14847/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The farm assist scheme supplements mostly small farms on bad agricultural land, mainly in the west of Ireland. Recipients retain the advantages of the jobseeker's allowance scheme such as the retention of secondary benefits and access to activation programmes. The 2018 Revised Estimates for my Department provide for expenditure of approximately €74.1 million on the farm assist scheme.

Budget 2017 fully reversed the previous cuts to the Farm Assist means test. The changes included that 70% of farm income is now assessed as means, down from 100% being assessed as means (which is equivalent to a 30% income disregard) and an additional annual means disregard of €254 for each of the first two children and €381 for the third and subsequent children.

The farm assist means test is flexible so as to allow for significant income fluctuations from one year to the next. It may also be noted that farm assist customers continue to receive more beneficial treatment than other self-employed persons as payments received under the Agri-Environment Options Scheme (AEOS), Green Low-Carbon Agri-Environment Scheme (GLAS) or Special Area of Conservation (SAC) schemes are assessed separately from other farm income. With regard to this income the first €2,540 is disregarded, and then 50% of the balance and related expenses are disregarded - with the balance being assessed as means.

It is estimated that the cost of changing the farm assist means testing rules in order that irrespective of the source of income the first €3,000 would be disregarded and the balance would be means tested at 50% is approximately €15 million for a full year. This estimate is based on the existing number of recipients and current rates.

However, it is envisaged that there would be an inflow of new farm assist claims if these measures were introduced. The Department cannot quantify the numbers involved and as such cannot calculate the associated additional costs. Therefore, the estimated cost of €15 million should be regarded as a minimum estimate.

Budget 2018 provided for a €5 per week increase in rate of payment for farm assist and the maximum rate increased from €193 to €198 per week from 26 March 2018.

Any changes to means assessment would have to be considered in a budgetary context.

Rural Social Scheme

441. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated cost of a proposal (details supplied) over a calendar year. [14848/18]

442. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the rationale for imposing a six year limit for some participants on the RSS; and her plans to abolish same in view of social and community value of this scheme. [14849/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 441 and 442 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. It should be noted that almost 50% of the current participants have been on the RSS for over 10 years. As a result, opportunities for new people to go on the scheme are very limited. It is in this context that a maximum six year participation limit on the scheme was introduced for participants commencing on or after 1st February 2017. The six year limit will ensure that there will be a throughput of places available. In addition income support will still be available to eligible farmers and fishermen who are not on RSS in the form of Farm or Fish Assist.

The deputy should be aware that 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.

There are currently no plans to change the eligibility conditions for persons over 55 years of age who commenced since 1st February 2017. Records available indicate that there are 206 RSS participants over 55 years who commenced on RSS since 1st February 2017.

It is estimated that the full year cost of an RSS place is €16,500 while the net cost is estimated at €6,000. This costing consists of wages paid to participants, fuel allowance, supervisory costs, fees to implementing bodies, fees to the payroll provider and provision of input costs for implementing bodies.

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. This is reflected in my announcement last week of the allocation of an additional 250 RSS places bringing the total number of places on the scheme to 3,350.

Rural Social Scheme Data

443. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of positions filled to date out of the 500 additional places provided for the rural social scheme in Budget 2017 to each company and Údarás na Gaeltachta delivering the RSS, by county; the number of participants in the rural social scheme over the period 2014 to 2017 and to date in 2018 by county, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14850/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The information requested is currently being compiled by my Department and will be provided to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Planning Issues

444. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on the National Planning Framework proposal to introduce better planning in relation to climate change; the way in which he will ensure the implementation of this planning in view of the timeframe; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[14602/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):

The National Planning Framework (NPF), published together with the National Development Plan (NDP) as part of Project Ireland 2040 on 16 February 2018, sets out an ambitious high-level national vision for Ireland for 2040, and provides the framework and principles to manage future population and economic growth over the next 20 years, catering for around 1 million extra people, 660,000 extra jobs and 550,000 extra homes.

Chapter 9 on Realising our Sustainable Future addresses the key national environmental challenges we face including the need to accelerate action on climate change. The National Policy Objectives iterated in this Chapter acknowledge the importance of the planning system in influencing issues in relation to environmental and sustainability goals.

Project Ireland 2040 provides for €22bn investment in climate action related policies which will facilitate the realisation of key policy objectives in line with the NPF principles. Programme and project identification to enable overall implementation of Project Ireland 2040 will also be progressed at national, regional and local levels, through specific measures contained in Project Ireland 2040, allied to forthcoming Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSESs) being developed by the three Regional Assemblies by the end of this year. These Strategies will subsequently be further elaborated upon at local authority city and county development plan levels.

My Department, in a recent Circular (Circular Letter FPS 02/2018), highlighted that from 16th February 2018, in accordance with Section 2 of the Planning and Development 2000 (as amended) and all other related provisions of the Act, including, in particular, Sections 9, 10, 22A, 23, 37A and 143, the NPF replaced the National Spatial Strategy (NSS) and now represents the overarching national planning policy document of direct relevance to the planning functions of regional and planning authorities, including An Bord Pleanála.

Moreover, the Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2016, currently at Seanad Committee stage, will, once enacted, provide statutory underpinning to the process of implementing, updating and reviewing the National Planning Framework into the future.

Housing Data

445. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount spent on social inclusion under the housing expenditure heading of Vote 34 under his Department per annum in each of the years 2014 to 2017; the provision for 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14534/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):

Dedicated funding for Housing Inclusion Support programmes is provided within my Department's Housing Vote on an annual basis. This funding is provided to local authorities for the provision of programmes to support the delivery of Traveller specific accommodation and related services, the provision of homeless services and also supports to meet the housing needs of people with disabilities.

The funding details requested by the Deputy in respect of the Housing Inclusion Supports programmes are set out in the following table. The data for 2015, 2016 and 2017 includes amounts which were self-funded by certain local authorities from surplus Local Property Tax receipts.

Subhead A.5 Expenditure - Housing Inclusion Supports

2014 Expenditure €m	2015 Expenditure €m	2016 Expenditure €m	2017 Expenditure €m	2018 Budget Provision €m
57.41	74.49	97.89	118.64	132.66

More broadly, my Department operates and funds a wide range of housing initiatives which support social inclusion and assist people and communities to fully participate in society. Such programmes include the provision of appropriate housing to meet identified need, a range of improvement, renewal and regeneration programmes and supports to maintain people within their homes. Funding details under these housing programmes is set out in the annual Estimates of Public Expenditure, available at the following link:

<http://www.per.gov.ie/en/rev/>.

Home Loan Scheme

446. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of take-ups of the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14538/18]

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. My Department does not collect information on the number of enquiries to local authorities regarding the loan, the number of complete loan applications received by local authorities, or the reasons as to why a loan application may be declined.

As is currently the case, my Department will continue to publish information on the overall number and value of (1) local authority loan approvals and (2) local authority loan drawdowns on its website at the following link - <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/house-prices-loans-and-profile-borrowers/local-authority-loan-activity> . This information is currently updated to end Q3 2017; Q4 data will be published shortly.

Home Loan Scheme

447. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the way in which the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme will deliver affordable homes to buy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14541/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): As the Deputy is aware, 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.

The new loan is designed to 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 first-time buyers who 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.

Other aspects of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness address the delivery of more affordable homes. This is a major priority for Government, focusing in particular on the cities of Dublin, Galway and Cork, where people are facing the greatest affordability challenge. Increased delivery of homes at more affordable prices will involve local authorities developing their own residential land bank, comprising some 1,700 hectares, to its full potential.

I am providing Exchequer funding of €25 million, over 2018 and 2019, as a key contribution towards the delivery of more affordable housing. I expect that in the region of 3,000 new affordable homes can be made available through a range of schemes and initiatives, with the long-term ambition for some 10,000 additional affordable homes to be provided for sale or rent, as the initiatives are rolled out.

Housing Provision

448. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans for targets and timelines to provide affordable homes to buy and rent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14543/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The delivery of more affordable homes, to buy or rent, is a major priority for Government, focusing in particular on the cities of Dublin, Galway and Cork, where people are facing the greatest affordability challenge. Increased delivery of homes at more affordable prices will involve local authorities developing their own residential land bank, comprising some 1,700 hectares, to its full potential. Where appropriate, it will include local authorities working with approved housing bodies and realising a mix of tenures from these lands, including affordable purchase and/or cost rental.

Recognising that there are enabling infrastructure requirements on some sites, I am also providing Exchequer funding of €25 million over 2018 and 2019 for a targeted programme, where the local authority will make low-cost serviced sites available for affordable housing, within the parameters of the overall affordable purchase scheme that will be set down in Regulations. My Department is currently drawing up the criteria for access to this fund, taking account of broader policy on affordable housing, and will be seeking submissions from local authorities in the coming weeks.

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.

In overall terms, from initial estimates, I expect that in the region of 3,000 new affordable homes can be made available through a range of schemes and initiatives, with the long-term ambition for some 10,000 additional affordable homes to be provided for sale or rent, as the

initiatives are rolled out. Initial indications from local authorities in Dublin, Cork and Galway highlight the potential for almost 4,000 affordable homes from their land. Over the coming weeks my Department will be working with local authorities to refine and finalise these targets.

Home Loan Scheme

449. **Deputy Michael Lowry** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason the official information booklet and website published for the Rebuilding Ireland home loan does not state information (details supplied) in connection to the deposit criteria of the home loan application process. [14556/18]

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, the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan, was made available on 1 February 2018.

The new loan enables credit-worthy first-time buyers to access sustainable mortgage lending to purchase new or second-hand properties in a suitable price range. The low rate of fixed interest associated with the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan provides first time buyers with access to mortgage finance that they may not otherwise have been able to afford at a higher interest rate.

Full details of the loan's eligibility criteria and other information is available from the dedicated Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan website, <http://rebuildingirelandhomeloan.ie/>.

In relation to the deposit criteria issue referred to, I have asked my Department to liaise with the Housing Agency to provide additional detail on the website in order to clarify this issue for prospective applicants.

Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

450. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount that his Department has spent on social media training and consultancy in each year since 2016. [14571/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): A number of social media accounts are operated by my Department and must be managed in accordance with my Department's Social Media policy. My Department has not spent any money on social media training or consultancy since 2016.

Departmental Staff Training

451. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if training has been delivered in his Department on the use of social media (details supplied); the frequency and cost of this training; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14587/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): A number of social media accounts are operated by my Department and are managed in accordance with my Department's Social Media policy. My Department has not spent any money on social media training or consultancy on the use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter.

Departmental Contracts Data

452. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the value of contracts for services awarded to a company (details supplied) by his Department since 2010 in tabular form; and the type of work undertaken by the company. [14632/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): No contracts for services were awarded to the Company referred to in the period outlined.

Homeless Accommodation Provision

453. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number beds for rough sleepers to be provided to the end of 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14771/18]

454. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will report on the closure of homelessness beds opened under the winter initiative in County Wicklow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14774/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 453 and 454 together.

My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of accommodation and associated services for homeless persons rests with individual housing authorities and accordingly my Department has no function in relation to operational issues, which are a matter for the relevant housing authorities.

I continue to emphasise the need for all housing authorities to have sufficient capacity in emergency accommodation and to have appropriate facilities in place for every person sleeping rough, on any night of the week. As provision will be based on demand, it is not possible at this stage to give a figure for the number of beds that will be provided during 2018.

Cold Weather Initiatives operate across all local authorities to provide additional emergency beds for rough sleepers. These arrangements ensure that additional temporary beds can be brought into use across a range of existing services and facilities, for singles and couples who need them during periods of cold weather. These beds are temporary in nature and it is a matter for individual local authorities to determine the period of their operation.

Severe Weather Events Expenditure

455. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if additional funding will be provided to Cavan and Monaghan County Councils for the additional costs incurred in the provision of services due to recent storms; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14782/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): Since 2009, my Department has made financial support available to assist local authorities in meeting the costs of clean-up and necessary immediate works associated with the response to significant severe weather emergency events. This is in recogni-

tion of the exceptional nature of activities carried out by local authorities in responding to these types of emergencies and the fact that the costs of these un-programmed activities cannot be met from within existing resources.

In relation to the recent severe cold weather and snow that caused widespread disruption in many parts of the country, my Department is writing to local authorities, including Cavan and Monaghan County Councils, inviting them to submit claims for recoupment of the exceptional costs involved in the response and clean-up.

Funding for repair of public infrastructure is undertaken by the relevant Departments in line with their sectorial responsibility. It is a matter for each Government Department to liaise directly with local authorities in relation to funding of repairs and restoration being carried out through the local government system.

Tenant Purchase Scheme Administration

456. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when new criteria for the tenant purchase scheme will be introduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14783/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): 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 some further inter-Departmental consultation was necessary and due consideration had to be given to possible implementation arrangements. These matters are now almost completed and I expect to be in a position to publish the outcome of the review shortly.

Social and Affordable Housing Eligibility

457. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the income eligibility limits for social housing in areas such as counties Cavan and Monaghan will be increased; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14784/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): 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.

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 in late Summer 2018.

Mortgage to Rent Scheme Data

458. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reforms made to the mortgage to rent scheme; the date on which such reforms were implemented; the number of applications to the mortgage to rent scheme made each month in 2016 and 2017; the number of successful mortgage to rent applications each month in 2016 and 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14828/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Following a Review of the Mortgage to Rent (MTR) Scheme, published on 8 February 2017, a range of amendments to the eligibility criteria and administration of the MTR scheme came into effect to enable more properties to qualify and to make the scheme more flexible and accessible to borrowers. The Review, available at the following link <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/changes-in-mortgage-to-rent-scheme/>, explored the impediments to participation in the scheme and recommended a number of actions to make the scheme work better for borrowers. My Department and the Housing Agency are working with all stakeholders to ensure that the actions set out in the Review are being effectively implemented to benefit a greater number of households.

The following table gives a breakdown of MTR applications received each month during 2016 and 2017. In terms of changes to the eligibility criteria, the property price thresholds were increased and more flexibility was provided in respect of the size of properties that could qualify for the scheme. The changes to the MTR eligibility criteria and other process changes came into effect on 27 March 2017 and therefore applications received from April onwards should be regarded as applications submitted under the revised MTR scheme. One of the changes to the MTR process is that the borrower must be approved by their local authority for social housing support prior to the submission of a completed MTR application to the Housing Agency. This process change may have impacted the number of MTR applications received by the Housing Agency in the initial months subsequent to the implementation of the process changes arising from the review recommendations.

Number of MTR applications received		
Month	2016	2017
January	28	47
February	47	14
March	27	36
April	30	4
May	63	3
June	23	15
July	33	31
August	24	15
September	42	25
October	16	29
November	38	32
December	23	31
Total	394	282

The Housing Agency publishes, on a quarterly basis, detailed statistical information on the operation of the MTR scheme, including the number of completed transactions. This information is available on the Agency's website at the following link:

<https://www.housingagency.ie/our-services/housing-supply-services/mortgage-to-rent.aspx>.

The MTR Review also concluded that the current financial model of the scheme may not, in its current configuration, be capable of delivering the scale of successful cases that could benefit from the scheme over time. In order to test the operability of alternative funding models for the scheme, the Housing Agency has been working with a number of financial entities who have expressed an interest in working with the MTR scheme to progress a number of alternative long-term lease arrangements. A call for Expressions of Interest from bodies interested in pursuing pilot operating models was initiated by the Housing Agency and the submission(s) received are currently being reviewed by the Agency, who will make recommendations to my Department as to the make-up of the pilots, which can then be initiated.

Departmental Staff Training

459. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the amount that her Department has spent on social media training and consultancy in each year since 2016. [14564/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I am advised that in the period 2016 to date, my Department spent €1,000 on social media training for staff. A breakdown of the year provided, training course, number of staff who attended and cost is supplied in the table below. I am further advised that, while my Department does not engage social media consultants, it has engaged third party service providers to assist with the provision of social media content and a range of other services for the Ireland 2016 Centenary Programme and the Creative Ireland Programme.

Year	Training Course	Number of Staff	Cost
2016	Social Media for Business	1	€500
2017	Social Media for Business	1	€500

Departmental Staff Training

460. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if training has been delivered in her Department on the use of social media (details supplied); the frequency and cost of this training; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14580/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I am advised that, during the period 2012 to 2017, my Department spent €6,383 on social media training for staff. A breakdown of the year provided, training course, number of staff who attended and cost is supplied in the following table.

Year	Training Course	Number of Staff	Cost
2012	Social Media in the Public Sector	3	€1,337
2013	Social Media for Consultation	1	€433
2013	Social Media Marketing	1	€349
2014	Social Media Training	20	€3,264
2016	Social Media for Business	1	€500
2017	Social Media for Business	1	€500

Arts Funding

461. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the source of funding support for an event (details supplied) being organised by a local artistic group. [14605/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): The Arts Council is statutorily independent under the Arts Act 2003 and I have no function in relation to funding decisions by the Council.

I am aware however that Local Authorities fund festivals and events from time to time, and the relevant local authority may be best placed to support an event such as that referred to in the question.

Departmental Contracts Data

462. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the value of contracts for services awarded to a company (details supplied) by her Department since 2010 in tabular form; and the type of work undertaken by the company. [14625/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I am advised that, since the establishment of this Department in June 2011, no contracts have been awarded by my Department to the company referenced by the Deputy.

EU Directives

463. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the EU directives not yet transposed into law; the deadline imposed by the EU for the transposition of same; the estimated date for transposition into law; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14785/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I am advised that there is at present one EU Directive which requires transposition into Irish law by my Department.

Directive 2014/52/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 amending Directive 2011/92/EU on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment was due for transposition by 16 May 2017. It is currently anticipated that the transposition into law of those elements of the directive which come under the

remit of my Department will be completed by end September.

Hen Harriers Threat Response Plan

464. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she and the Department Agriculture, Food and the Marine have examined with forestry and farming groups the idea of introducing a new forestry management protocol covering special protection areas important to the hen harrier, which will allow an annual quota of new plantings based on the areas identified as available for planting by National Parks and Wildlife Service. [14858/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): My Department is close to completion of its work on the Hen Harrier Threat Response Plan. This has entailed significant engagement with the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine, a major stakeholder in this matter.

The draft plan will address various matters relating to the conservation of the Hen Harrier, including the issue of forestry and planting. My Department (and other Departments with responsibilities in this area) will discuss the draft plan with the Consultative Committee, which includes many farming and forest sector representatives, before settling the matter.