

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 11, inclusive, answered orally.

Mental Health Services Staff

12. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Health the details of the CHO's recruitment initiatives; and the steps being taken to improve recruitment, for example, acute units, community mental health adult teams and CAMHS. [16230/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The level of vacancies and difficulty in recruiting and retaining skilled staff, particularly nursing and medical staff, poses a significant challenge for the provision of Mental Health Services. The Mental Health Division continues to work with Community Health Organisations (CHOs) to maximise and ensure the most effective use of resources. There is work on-going with the HSE HR partners and the National Recruitment Service to attract and retain staff within mental health services.

The CHOs are continuing to recruit across all staff categories in accordance with the Pay and Numbers strategy and are actively pursuing the conversion of agency staff to improve cost effectiveness and workforce continuity.

Consultant Psychiatrists within the CAMHS speciality have proven problematic to recruit and retain, particularly in some CHO areas, and while recruitment efforts have been on-going it must be acknowledged there is a serious shortage of suitably qualified CAMHS Consultants at both national and European level.

Psychiatric Nurse numbers have been affected by the age profile of the grade, with a large number of retirements in recent years. To combat this, agreement was reached at the Workplace Relations Commission in August 2016 which provided for 130 extra student places per annum. Around 32 extra places have been provided for post-graduate students who wish to transfer from general or intellectual nursing disability to mental health. In addition it was agreed that retired staff nurses who returned to service would be able to do so up to the Long Service Increment point of the Scale.

In addition, the HSE continue to target relevant events, for example an international CAMHS Medical Conference in Geneva in late 2017 in which they hosted a stand in the convention centre. Further to this, the CHOs are also exploring the use of technology and Skype to communicate directly with prospective international candidates for screening and interview and to make the system more responsive and to reduce costs.

Notwithstanding the above, the HSE is working to provide the best possible service within

available staffing resources. A key focus is on managing clinical risks and prioritising referrals accordingly. Mental health services, including CAMHS, will continue to deliver on a number of service improvements to increase productivity and efficiencies. A key approach to developing services for young people, and thereby reducing pressures on CAMHS, is the decision by Government to increase access to counselling services in Primary Care, with the appointment of 114 Assistant Psychologists and 20 Psychologists. These key staff are now being put in place nationally by the HSE.

In addition, I have requested the HSE to examine as a matter of priority the feasibility of providing counselling support services remotely via a Tele-Psych type service at primary care centres.

Questions Nos. 13 and 14 answered orally.

Psychological Services

15. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health the number of counselling and educational psychologists required to complete extensive in-service training in order to maintain eligibility for their own jobs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17031/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In 2015, the HSE established a group to review the eligibility criteria for employment as a psychologist in the Psychological Services.

This review was completed in 2016 and made recommendations which have been accepted in full by the HSE Leadership Team. The group reviewed the care group delineation and decided to move the requirement away from named psychology qualifications solely. Instead, a combination of qualification and placements or supervised work experience will be considered.

The criteria established do not require existing psychologists to undergo supervised work experience to maintain eligibility for their current role. The criteria, which will come into effect in October 2019, are applicable to candidates applying for recruitment competitions. Existing psychologists are only required to have completed the additional placements if they are applicants for recruitment competitions from October 2019 onwards. To be clear, there is no compulsion to complete these placements if an individual is not entering a recruitment process.

The review group did however, recommend that existing psychologists should be facilitated to acquire the necessary supervised work experiences, should they wish to compete in any future recruitment competitions.

Services for People with Disabilities

16. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the reason the HSE fell short of its target for the establishment of children's disability network teams in 2017. [17105/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The HSE is rolling out the Progressing Disability Services for Children and Young People Programme. This Programme entails the reconfiguration of all current HSE and HSE funded children's disability services into geographically-based Children's Disability Network Teams.

The Programme aims to achieve a nationally equitable approach to service provision for all children based on their individual need and regardless of where they live or where they go to

school.

Some HSE Areas have already reconfigured into interdisciplinary Children's Disability Network Teams. A total of 56 networks are in place. The remaining 82 teams are developing their reconfiguration and implementation plan and will be reconfigured in 2018. HSE Areas currently planning reconfiguration continue to have significant Early Intervention and School Age Services in place, provided either directly by the HSE or by voluntary service providers funded by the HSE.

A key enabler to the establishment of the remaining Children's Disability Network Teams is the recruitment of Children's Disability Network Managers. The grade and role for this post has been agreed with the Department of Health and Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. Following the outcome of a protracted IR process with FORSA, a process of mediation is currently on-going with the relevant Lead Agencies, including key voluntary providers, to agree a path forward for recruitment of these posts. This process is due to conclude shortly, following which the recruitment process will commence.

Health Services Staff Remuneration

17. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the reason the restoration of pay to section 39 workers cannot be costed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13518/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under section 39 of the Health Act 2004, the HSE provides financial assistance to organisations by means of a grant. Section 39 legally underpins the provision of services similar or supplementary to a service that the HSE may provide. In 2017, the HSE provided funding of approximately €800 million to over 2,200 of these agencies. The funding provided can range from high value, in their millions, to relatively modest amounts of just a few hundred euro.

Staff in these organisations were not subject to the provisions of FEMPI legislation. They were not a party to the Public Service Agreements. As such, they are not covered by the pay restoration provided for in these Agreements. While it is understood that pay savings were made by the organisations, the precise mix of pay cuts or other savings measures will have varied. Also, where there were pay cuts, it is not at all clear that they were applied in a universally consistent manner, as is the case in the public sector. As a result, the cost of restoring pay will also vary between these organisations, depending on the actions taken.

Therefore, the Government has put in place a process to establish a deeper understanding of the funding position in these grant - aided organisations and the true extent of the pay reductions applied. I asked the HSE to engage with the Section 39 organisations to establish the facts around what cuts were applied and how and when they were implemented. When these facts are established, it will inform the assessment of the costs involved. A plan then needs to be developed in relation to possible solutions and their implementation.

I am expecting an interim report on this matter from the HSE in the coming weeks.

Hospital Groups

18. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health his views on the need for investment in regional hospitals and in particular in the emergency department at Cavan General

Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16830/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The RCSI Hospital Group has identified the need for development of the resuscitation area in Cavan Emergency Department. Future investment in Cavan General Hospital will be considered within the overall acute hospital infrastructure programme, the prioritised needs of the hospital groups and within the overall capital envelope available to the health service.

The National Development Plan provides €10.9 billion for Health capital developments across the country, including both national programmes and individual projects, across acute, primary and social care. Health capital projects and programmes currently underway will continue.

As to be expected with a ten year plan, many proposals are at an early stage and will require to progress through appraisal, planning design and tender before a firm timeline or funding required can be established.

Mental Health Services Administration

19. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to establish a national co-ordinated helpline and clearly publicised nationwide professional supports for persons with mental health issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16234/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): Improving access to mental health services is a key priority for this government. At present there are a number of voluntary and non-governmental organisations being supported by the HSE that are providing mental health support to the public via the telephone, internet or text message.

In December 2017, I published the recommendations of the National Taskforce on Youth Mental Health. These included recommendations to provide active digital listening and sign-posting services that will be accessible by telephone or mobile phone and on the internet for members of the public. It is envisaged that such services will form part of an overall comprehensive system of mental health care specifically designed for young people but accessible to everyone.

The proposed service will be broader than a telephone helpline as studies have shown that the use of a full array of digital technologies can play an important role in the delivery of mental health supports for the whole population from children up to and including older people. The skills to develop such tools are already available and existing services should be enhanced, expanded and co-ordinated to provide an easily-accessible, responsive, quality-assured suite of digital and online mental health supports and services for people.

The HSE is committed to urgently establishing coordinated ICT based mental health supports including a helpline. Commencing in February 2018, the HSE has initiated the development of a Digital Mental Health Support project encompassing the expansion of ICT based mental health supports in Ireland. Within this project, a key aspect relates to the exploration of options towards the development of a coordinated helpline to assist those experiencing mental health difficulties and their families. Working in collaboration with existing partners in this space, the HSE is currently examining the most efficient, effective and suitable arrangements with a view to providing the optimum telephony based solution. In addition the HSE currently supports *yourmentalhealth.ie* which contains public facing information about services and supports. A final date for roll-out of this service is yet to be determined, but significant work is on-going.

Mental Health Services Provision

20. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health when the new 50 bed psychiatric unit at UHG will open; the number of beds that will be available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17113/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The HSE has advised me of its plan to open the new 50 bed Acute Adult Mental Health Unit in University Hospital Galway on a phased basis. In the first phase the HSE will open 45 beds before the 1 June 2018 and in the second phase the remaining five beds will be opened by the end of 2018.

This new state of the art purpose built unit will provide better quality mental health services in the Galway area. The unit when opened will replace the current 45 bed in-patient facility at the hospital which does not meet the latest standards and urgently needs to be vacated in the interest of service users and staff. The new building is on the UHG site, a short distance from the current unit.

Hospital Services

21. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health the status of the provision of an endoscopy unit for Naas General Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17108/18]

36. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Health the proposed expansion plans at Naas General Hospital under the health priorities of the National Development Plan 2018-2027; if timelines or individual investment amounts are available for the new endoscopy unit and new mental health unit to serve the residents of County Kildare and west County Wicklow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11318/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 21 and 36 together.

The endoscopy suite and the mental health acute unit at Naas Hospital are both included in the National Development Plan 2018-2027.

The National Development Plan provides €10.9 billion to invest in infrastructure, equipment and additional service capacity for the public health sector. This represents an increase of 165% in capital funding over the previous decade. The additional capital funding is predominately in the second half of the plan.

It is important to recognise that this is a long-term plan which provides for a large number of Health developments across the country including developments at Naas Hospital.

As is to be expected with a ten year plan there are many development proposals, all of which are at different stages of progress.

Medicinal Products

22. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health if he will make information available on the safety of Misoprostol and Mifepristone; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17120/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): There are several misoprostol-containing medicines authorised for use in Ireland, two of which contain misoprostol as the sole, active ingredient. All misoprostol-containing medicines are available only on foot of a prescription. As prescription-only medicines, they should only be taken by a patient when prescribed for them by their medical practitioner, or other healthcare professional, as appropriate.

A medicine can only be placed on the Irish market when it has been granted a marketing authorisation. This marketing authorisation may be granted following an application by the pharmaceutical company to the Health Products Regulatory Authority or the European Medicines Agency.

A marketing authorisation may only be granted following a review of the safety, quality and efficacy data submitted by a company as part of this application and where it is considered that there is a positive benefit-risk associated with that medicine.

No medicine is completely free from the risk of side-effects. Therefore, this marketing authorisation process considers and weighs up the various benefits and risks associated with the use of a medicine before determining whether or not to grant the marketing authorisation. It also informs the manner in which the medicine may be used, or the restrictions placed around its use, so as to ensure the protection of patient safety.

The safety information associated with all medicines can be found in the Summary of Product Characteristics which accompanies, and forms part of, the marketing authorisation for a medicine.

The patient leaflet, which is included in the medicines package, contains similar information and is also available on the Health Products Regulatory Authority website, along with the more comprehensive Summary of Product Characteristics.

There are currently no medicines containing mifepristone authorised in Ireland and therefore there is no associated Summary of Product Characteristics containing this safety information.

Non-Consultant Hospital Doctors Recruitment

23. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the measures taken to tackle the appointment of non-specialist doctors as consultants; the steps he has taken to address this issue since it was first raised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16980/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under section 57 of the Health Act 2004, the HSE's regulatory functions include responsibility for all Consultant appointments in the public health service in Ireland including HSE hospitals, voluntary hospitals, mental health services and other agencies; whether additional, replacement, temporary or locum.

In March 2008 the HSE amended the qualifications specified for Consultant posts to require membership of the specialist division of the Register of Medical Practitioners maintained by the Medical Council. The HSE Policy in respect of all Consultant Appointments, both permanent and temporary, requires that they are on the Specialist Register. There are limited circumstances where in order to ensure Senior Medical coverage that an experienced Registrar not on the Specialist Register may cover for an absent Consultant to ensure the provision of safe quality care. This will only occur as a final option in emergency circumstances.

Any doctor who occupies a consultant post, even if he/she is not on the specialist register would still hold a medical licence and would be on a division of the Medical Council Register.

They would therefore be fully qualified to practice medicine though not as consultants.

The HSE issued instructions to all managers last July in relation to the management of those in posts who are not on the Specialist Register:-

- Management are to ensure that the registration status of each consultant in the employment of the service concerned is properly recorded.

- A risk mitigation plan must be put in place for each consultant post where the appointee does not hold the qualifications specified for the appointment by the HSE. This plan is to include appropriate senior clinical oversight as required.

- Consultants appointed prior to 2008 who do not hold specialist registration are to be supported in achieving registration in conjunction with National Doctors Training and Planning Unit.

- Employers were also asked to ensure the contracts of temporary/locum doctors who do not hold the qualifications required for the post they occupy be ended and their employment terminated.

It is essential that the HSE comply with statutory requirements and its own policy directions when filling consultant posts. I am satisfied that doing so will enable it to address this issue.

At a national level the Government remains committed to continuing to increase the number of consultants and to the delivery of a consultant-led service. At the end of February 2018 there were 2,977 consultants (whole time equivalents) in the public health services. This is 98 more than the end of February 2017 figure and an increase of 750 in the past decade.

Hospital Waiting Lists Action Plans

24. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to reduce waiting lists for ophthalmology treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17006/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Improving waiting times for hospital procedures is a key commitment in the Programme for Government and in 2018 €50 million was allocated to the NTPF to provide treatment for patients. The recently launched Inpatient/Day Case Action Plan outlines the combined impact of HSE and NTPF activity in 2018 to reduce the number of patients waiting for treatment to below 70,000 in 2018. This plan marks a very important milestone in delivering on this commitment.

In 2018 the NTPF will outsource 20,000 inpatient day cases, while the HSE will deliver 1.14 million hospital operations or procedures. This will mean that by the end of 2018 we will expect to see a significant reduction in the number waiting for a procedure to under 70,000 - from a peak of 86,100 in July 2017.

As part of this initiative all patients who are waiting more than 9 months for a cataract, hip and knee replacement, tonsils, Gastro Intestinal scope or one of four other high-volume treatments, and who are clinically suitable for outsourcing, will be offered treatment in 2018.

The HSE published the Report of the Primary Care Eye Services Review Group in June 2017. The Report sets out the way forward for a significant amount of eye services to be provided in a primary care setting. This will ensure that hospital services are focused on patients who require more specialist diagnostics or treatments. The recommendations of the Report are to be implemented on a phased basis subject to available resources.

General Practitioner Services

25. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the reason the HSE undertook no public consultation on the closure of MIDOC services in Birr and Edenderry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17054/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): An independent review of MIDOC services in Offaly was undertaken in 2017, which identified concerns in the areas of clinical risk, medical emergencies, and lone working. These concerns related specifically to locum doctors working alone at the MIDOC satellite sites at Birr and Edenderry.

Since 2 April 2018, MIDOC has been operating one fully functioning treatment centre on the campus of the Midland Regional Hospital Tullamore for the entire Offaly population. This is broadly in line with the other MIDOC centres across the Midlands. A full review and assessment of the service provision for the entire county was undertaken in terms of quality, risk, safety, population, activity levels and viability before these changes were made.

Previous service provision at the Edenderry and Birr satellite sites was limited and available on a part-time basis only. At all other times patients would have appointments facilitated for them at their nearest full-time MIDOC treatment centre.

It was also not possible for the doctors in the Edenderry or Birr sites to provide home visits to patients. Following the reorganisation of County Offaly MIDOC services it is now possible to provide call outs and home visits to patients where clinically indicated.

A review of current monthly activity levels indicates that Tullamore will be more than capable of absorbing the patients from Birr and Edenderry centres. An additional doctor has been placed on duty in Tullamore during weekends and public holidays from 12pm to 8pm. This will facilitate the more effective management of call outs to the entire county, including Birr and Edenderry. Additional administration support will also be provided to free up doctors' time, resulting in more patient contact and a more effective out-of-hours service for all.

I would like to reassure the Deputy that there has been no reduction in funding or total GP clinical time allocated to the MIDOC service. As the Deputy will be aware, local HSE management met with public representatives from Birr and Edenderry on 17 April to discuss the reorganisation of MIDOC services. At this meeting the HSE accepted the need for improved public communication around such service changes in future. The HSE also agreed to request a meeting between public representatives and MIDOC. This request has been submitted to MIDOC and is currently being considered.

Primary Care Centres Data

26. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health the range of health services that are available in the Kilcock primary health care facility; the number of general practitioners that are due to or that have commenced practice in this centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17109/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

Hospital Groups

27. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health the status of the options appraisal in respect of the future acute hospital needs in County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17114/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I gave approval to the Saolta Group to conduct an options appraisal in respect of future acute hospital needs in Galway. I understand that the Saolta Group has undertaken a tender process for this options appraisal and letters will issue shortly to the successful and unsuccessful vendors.

The Deputy may wish to note that the National Development Plan provides that new dedicated ambulatory elective-only hospital services will be introduced in Galway as well as in Dublin and Cork. These will provide high volume, low complexity procedures on a day and outpatient basis, together with a range of ambulatory diagnostic services. It is envisaged that these facilities will be sited adjacent to general hospitals.

Medicinal Products Availability

28. **Deputy Michael Collins** asked the Minister for Health the progress which has been made in the negotiations between the HSE and a company (details supplied) to ensure that the 19 patients currently involved in the clinical trials will have unlimited access to the Respreeza treatment for the remainder of their lives; and if the small group affected by alpha 1 here will also have access to Respreeza. [16242/18]

72. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the progress made towards securing consistent access to a drug (details supplied) for persons suffering with alpha-1 antitrypsin deficiency via its approval for reimbursement by the HSE. [17008/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 28 and 72 together.

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.

General Practitioner Data

29. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health his views on falling general practitioner numbers; the steps he is taking to address the fall in numbers through the negotiation of a new general practitioner contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16979/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Government is committed to delivering more non-acute care within the primary care sector, so that better care closer to home can be provided for communities around the country.

GPs play an important role in the primary care system. The number of GPs on the specialist register continues to increase – up from 2,270 in 2010 to 3,637 in 2017 and there are now 2,485 GPs contracted to the HSE under the GMS scheme compared to 2,098 in 2008. It should be noted that as of 1 March there were only 23 GMS panels that do not have a permanent GP in place – a vacancy rate of less than 1%.

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 an enhanced supports package for rural GP practices.

In addition, the Government has also taken steps to expand GP training. In 2009, there were 120 GP training places and this year there are 194 GP training places available for the 2018 GP training intake. The Government is committed to further increasing this number to 259 places annually in future years.

It is generally accepted that there is a need to modernise the current GMS contract and ensure that general practice benefits patients while providing for a viable and rewarding career for current and future GPs. The aim is to develop a contract which has a population health focus, providing in particular for health promotion and disease prevention and for the structured ongoing care of chronic conditions.

Engagement with GP representatives on contractual issues will commence in the coming weeks. It is important that any new contract will result in service improvements across general practice benefiting both patients and GPs.

Hospitals Building Programme

30. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the further delays in relation to the extension and refurbishment works at Kanturk and Millstreet community hospitals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17035/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): My Department has asked the Health Service Executive to reply directly to the Deputy with regard to capital developments at Kanturk and Millstreet Community Hospitals.

Psychological Services

31. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health the reason Cork city and county accounts for 40% of overdue HSE assessments of need under the Disability Act 2005; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17083/18]

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

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

Hospital Services

32. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health his plans for the provision of additional capacity in acute hospitals to alleviate high levels of bed occupancy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17088/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Against a background of growing demand for hospital services and high acute hospital occupancy rates, Government provided €30 million in 2017 and a further €40 million in 2018 for measures to increase acute hospital capacity and alleviate overcrowding in Emergency Departments. Almost 50% of this funding was used to deliver home support packages and transitional care beds to reduce the incidence of delayed discharges. Furthermore, over 200 beds have been opened this winter and more beds are due to come on stream later in the year.

In the light of the conclusions of the Health Service Capacity Review that the system will need nearly 2,600 additional acute hospital beds by 2031, I have asked my Department to work with the HSE to identify the location and mix of beds across the hospital system which can be opened and staffed this year and into 2019 in order to improve preparedness for Winter 2018/2019.

As outlined in the Capacity Review, the demographic pressures being experienced by the health service are such, as to demand not just additional capacity, but continued emphasis on health and wellbeing initiatives, an improved model of care with a stronger role for enhanced community based services and continued improvement in productivity including in acute hos-

pitals.

The Government has approved a record level of capital investment in health at €10.9 billion over the next ten years. This will provide for a major enhancement of the capacity of our health services to meet demand. Importantly, the accelerated introduction of additional capacity for 2018/2019 will be matched by forthcoming reforms including the publication of a detailed Sláintecare Implementation Plan and the renegotiation of the current GP contract.

Hospital Groups

33. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the financial challenges facing the Saolta hospital group in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17077/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service issue, I have asked the HSE to reply to you directly.

Hospital Services

34. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the details of the radiology unit for the Regional Hospital Mullingar as outlined in the Capital Plan 2016-2021 which will host the MRI scanner which was fundraised by a group (details supplied); the timeframe for the establishment of the unit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16741/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department has asked the Health Service Executive to reply directly to the Deputy with regard to current position on the radiology department and the MRI at the Regional Hospital, Mullingar.

Primary Care Centres Provision

35. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the timeframe for the delivery of a primary care centre (details supplied); the staffing and range of services to be provided at the centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16289/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department has asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly in relation to the development of a primary care centre at Rowlagh, Clondalkin, Dublin.

Question No. 36 answered with Question No. 21

Hospital Overcrowding

37. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether it is appropriate for endoscopy day beds in Connolly Hospital to be used to cope with emergency department overcrowding. [17096/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Against a background of growing demand for unscheduled care and high acute hospital occupancy rates, Government provided €30 million in 2017 and a further €40 million in 2018 for measures to increase acute hospital capacity

and alleviate overcrowding in Emergency Departments (EDs). Almost 50% of this funding was used to deliver home support packages and transitional care beds to reduce the incidence of delayed discharges. Furthermore, over 200 beds have been opened this winter and more beds are due to come on stream later in the year.

Notwithstanding the increased level of resources provided, this winter has been particularly difficult for our health services with ED attendances up 3.7%, admissions up 3.3% and trolleys up 13.1% during the first quarter of the year, as compared to the same period in 2017.

The situation was further exacerbated by Storm Emma and the severe weather that followed. In response to this, I approved a further €5m in emergency funding to provide additional home support packages and transitional care beds to assist the safe discharge of patients who required support to return home following the adverse weather.

In the light of the conclusions of the Health Service Capacity Review that the system will need nearly 2,600 additional acute hospital beds by 2031, I have asked my Department to work with the HSE to identify the location and mix of beds across the hospital system which can be opened and staffed this year and into 2019 in order to improve preparedness for Winter 2018/2019.

In relation to the specific question asked regarding the use of endoscopy day beds in Connolly Hospital, as this is a service matter I have referred it to the HSE for a direct response.

Ambulance Service Provision

38. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health the status of the provision of ambulance services for the Connemara region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17112/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service issue, I have asked the HSE to reply to you directly.

Home Help Service

39. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Health the reason Wicklow LHO experienced a reduction of 33,722 home help hours in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17040/18]

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.

Oireachtas Joint Committee Reports

40. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health if the recommendations of the recent Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health's report on evaluating orphan drugs will be implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17089/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The report of the Joint Committee on Health entitled Evaluating Orphan Drugs was recently received by my Department. The report con-

tains a number of recommendations which are under consideration at present.

Health Services

41. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health if he is satisfied an association's (details supplied) guidelines are implemented in the health service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17117/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): The World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) publishes the Standards of Care and Ethical Guidelines, which articulate a professional consensus about the psychiatric, psychological, medical and surgical management of gender dysphoria. The guidelines are designed to help professionals understand the parameters within which they may offer assistance to those with gender dysphoria conditions.

The guidelines are designed to be flexible and, as described in the document, adaptations are suggested depending on the local clinical professional codes of conduct and regulatory and legislative frameworks. In Ireland, the diagnosis of gender dysphoria and clinical pathways for physical transitions are provided in the context of Irish professional codes, as well as regulatory and legislative frameworks, informed by WPATH Guidelines.

I am satisfied that the treatment of gender dysphoria in the Irish healthcare services reflects best practice in meeting the complex needs of transgender people.

General Practitioner Services Provision

42. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health the action being taken to ensure that rural Ireland has sufficient general practitioner cover; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17092/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): General Practitioners play an important role in the primary care system. The number of General Practitioners on the specialist register continues to increase – up from 2,270 in 2010 to 3,637 at the end of 2017 and the number of GPs contracted by the HSE under the GMS scheme has also risen from 2,098 in 2008 to 2,485 as of 1 April 2018.

The Government is aware of the manpower issues facing general practice and has taken steps to increase the numbers of General Practice training places accordingly.

In 2009, there were 120 General Practice training places available and this year it is expected that over 190 training places will be filled, an increase of around 60% over a nine year period. The number of training places will rise to 259 in coming years. There were over 400 applications for the 2018 training programme which is a significant increase of almost 50% on the number of applications from 2017.

Other efforts undertaken in recent years to increase the number of practicing 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. An enhanced supports package for rural practices has also been introduced which includes improved qualifying criteria for rural support and an increase in the financial allowance from €16,216.07 to €20,000 per annum.

The Government is also committed to engaging with General Practitioner representatives on necessary service improvements and contractual reforms to the current GMS contract. This process is expected to commence in the coming weeks.

Our goal is to develop a contractual framework that has a population health focus, providing in particular for health promotion, disease prevention and for the structured care of chronic conditions. This will enable general practitioners to better meet the needs of patients and will also promote general practice as a viable and rewarding career for both existing doctors and future medical graduates.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

43. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the reason for excluding persons over 21 years of age with type 1 diabetes from accessing the FreeStyle Libre glucose monitor available to all persons with diabetes based on clinical need; his plans to remove the age barrier recently set by the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16240/18]

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.

Emergency Departments Waiting Times

44. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Health the reason 291 persons over 75 years of age waited more than 24 hours in the emergency department of University Hospital Limerick during the first two months of 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17048/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Against a background of growing demand for unscheduled care and high acute hospital occupancy rates, Government provided €30 million in 2017 and a further €40 million in 2018 for measures to increase acute hospital capacity and alleviate overcrowding in Emergency Departments. Almost 50% of this funding was used to deliver home support packages and transitional care beds to reduce the incidence of delayed discharges. Furthermore, over 200 beds have been opened this winter and more beds are due to come on stream later in the year.

Notwithstanding the increased level of resources provided, this winter has been particularly difficult for our health services with ED attendances up 3.7% and admissions up 3.3% during the first quarter of the year, as compared to the same period in 2017. In relation to Limerick, in the first quarter of 2018, attendances rose by 11.6% and admissions rose by 10.8%, with a steep rise of 16.4% in attendances and 21% in admissions by those in the over 75 age group.

The situation was further exacerbated by Storm Emma and the severe weather that followed. In response to this, I approved a further €5m in emergency funding to provide additional home support packages and transitional care beds to assist the safe discharge of patients who required support to return home following the adverse weather.

In relation to the specific question asked regarding waiting times in UHL ED, as this is a service matter I have referred it to the HSE for a direct response.

Mental Health Services

45. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the timeframe for clinical staffing levels for the community psychiatry of old age mental health services to reach the level recommended in A Vision for Change; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17098/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Hospital Staff Recruitment

46. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the reason a full-time cardiologist, respiratory consultant and an associate professor from UCC that agreed to be assigned to University Hospital Kerry have not yet been appointed; and the status of progress in regard to same. [16236/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive (HSE) to respond to you directly as soon as possible.

Hospital Waiting Lists Action Plans

47. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which he is satisfied that issues affecting long waiting lists in public hospitals, overcrowding at accident and emergency services and other contributory factors affecting the fast, efficient and effective delivery of public health services are fully addressed or are in the course of so being; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17024/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): This Government is committed to tackling the key challenges our health system faces in relation to hospital overcrowding and long waiting times for treatment.

Against a background of growing demand for hospital services care and high acute hospital occupancy rates, Government provided €30 million in 2017 and a further €40 million in 2018 for measures to increase acute hospital capacity and alleviate overcrowding in Emergency Departments (EDs). Reflecting the focus on reducing patient waiting times, the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) allocation was increased to €55m this year, including administrative costs of €5m. That is more than double its 2017 allocation of €20m.

Notwithstanding increased investment, this winter has been particularly difficult for our health services, with ED attendances up 3.7%, admissions up 3.3% and trolleys up 13.1% during the first quarter of the year, as compared with the same period in 2017. This situation was further exacerbated by the severe weather that followed Storm Emma, which led to approval of a further €5m in emergency funding for extra home support packages and transitional care beds to assist the safe discharge of patients who required support to return home following the adverse weather.

The recently launched Inpatient/Day Case Action Plan for 2018 projects a reduction in the number of patients waiting for treatment to below 70,000 by year end - from a peak of 86,100 in July 2017. To achieve this, the NTPF will arrange treatment for 20,000 patients, while the HSE will deliver 1.14 million inpatient or day case procedures. I am committed to building on

this progress in 2019 and further reducing waiting time for Irish patients.

In the light of the Health Service Capacity Review conclusion that the system will need nearly 2,600 additional acute hospital beds by 2031, I have asked my Department to work with the HSE to identify the location and mix of beds across the hospital system which can be opened and staffed this year and into 2019 in order to improve preparedness for Winter 2018/2019.

Finally, a review of the Winter Initiative 2017/2018 is being undertaken, which will inform a 3 year plan for unscheduled care, as well as supporting the provision of additional capacity in Winter 2018/19.

Psychological Assessments Waiting Times

48. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the action being taken to address long waiting times for both CAMHS and primary care psychology services for children in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17038/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Disease Management

49. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health his plans to implement a similar practice to that in Germany for the detection and treatment of Lyme disease; his plans to improve follow-up care for persons following diagnosis; his views on whether current training for doctors is adequate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17059/18]

106. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health his plans to implement a similar practice to that in Germany for the detection and treatment of Lyme disease; his plans to improve follow-up care for persons following diagnosis; his views on whether current training for medical professionals is adequate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16502/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 49 and 106 together.

Lyme disease (also known as Lyme borreliosis) is an infection caused by a spiral-shaped bacterium called *Borrelia burgdorferi*. It is transmitted to humans by bites from ticks infected with the bacteria. The infection is generally mild affecting only the skin but can occasionally be more severe and highly debilitating. Lyme disease is diagnosed by medical history and physical examination. The infection is confirmed by blood tests which look for antibodies produced by an infected person's body in response to the infection. These normally take several weeks to develop and may not be present in the early stages of the disease. The standard laboratory approach to Lyme diagnostics is a two-stage approach and has been agreed by experts from the Scientific Advisory Committee of the Health Protection Surveillance Centre and other Irish and international experts. This testing is available in Ireland.

Laboratories in Ireland generally follow the laboratory testing recommendations of the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, the Infectious Disease Society of America, the European Federation of Neurological Societies, and the British Infection Association. Irish laboratories have their own quality assurance methods to make sure the tests are working correctly as well as being accredited by the Irish National Accreditation Body to perform the test cor-

rectly. In undertaking Lyme testing, it is essential that the results are interpreted in the light of the clinical condition of the patient. If the result of this initial screen is equivocal, the patient's samples are referred to the U.K.'s Rare and Imported Pathogens Laboratory. This laboratory uses a two-tier system recommended by American and European authorities which involves a screening test followed by a confirmatory test.

Testing which is performed abroad may be performed in laboratories which have not met National or International Accreditation (Quality Standards). These tests may be more likely to give a "false positive" result.

Medical training programmes at undergraduate or postgraduate level in Ireland provides specialist training in infectious diseases, including Lyme disease.

Lyme disease can be very successfully treated using common antibiotics by General Practitioners. These antibiotics are effective at clearing the rash and helping to prevent the development of complications. Antibiotics are generally given for up to three weeks. If complications develop, intravenous antibiotics may be considered.

The HSE Health Protection Surveillance Centre website (www.hpsc.ie) gives extensive information on Lyme disease diagnosis, treatment and how to avoid tick bites. A Lyme Disease Subcommittee of the Scientific Advisory Committee of HPSC with professional clinical, entomological, scientific and environmental health expert representation (including a representative of the Lyme Support Group, Tick-Talk Ireland) has been established to explore all possible ways of raising awareness about Lyme disease. This Subcommittee is expected to meet shortly with a view to finalising its report. This report will cover a number of areas, including initiatives undertaken to date, summary advice relating to awareness, preventive advice for the general public, preventive advice and material for those responsible for sites or locations known to have or suspected as having higher densities of ticks, and summary advice relating to GP management of the condition. Any person who is suffering ill health is eligible to seek medical attention, and to access appropriate health and social care services, irrespective of the cause of their symptoms.

Hospitals Building Programme

50. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if new hospitals built in Dublin under the National Development Plan 2018-2027 will be located in areas of easy access for persons from the wider Leinster area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17103/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Development Plan is a ten year plan which will provide the capital funding to develop dedicated ambulatory elective-only hospital facilities in Dublin, Cork and Galway. The aim is to both increase capacity in the hospital system and provide a better separation of scheduled and unscheduled care, in line with the recommendations of Health Service Capacity Review and the Sláintecare Report. They will provide increased, protected capacity for elective treatment and free up capacity in major hospitals to address higher complexity and emergency care.

It is envisaged that these facilities will be sited adjacent to general hospitals.

As is to be expected with a ten year plan, many proposals, including dedicated ambulatory elective-only hospital facilities in Dublin, are at a very early stage and will require to progress through appraisal, planning, design and tender before a firm location, timeline or funding required can be established.

Hospitals Building Programme

51. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health when work will commence on the building of the proposed new elective hospital in County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17050/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Development Plan provides €10.9 billion to invest in infrastructure, equipment and additional service capacity for the public health sector.

The National Development Plan is a ten year plan which will provide the capital funding to develop dedicated ambulatory elective-only hospital facilities. We must ensure that we carefully plan the use of this capital funding so as to meet the populations health needs and achieve value for money.

As is to be expected with a ten year plan, many proposals, including an elective-only hospital in Galway, are at a very early stage and will require to progress through appraisal, planning, design and tender before a firm location, timeline or funding required can be established.

Health Services Reports

52. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health when a Sláintecare implementation plan will be brought forward; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17090/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Deputy is aware, I supported the work of the All-Party Committee on the Future of Healthcare and I welcomed the publication of the Sláintecare Report. The Report represents a significant milestone in the history of health services development in Ireland, and I intend to harness the consensus generated by the Report to move forward with a programme of health reform. The Government is committed to making tangible improvements in our health service and the Sláintecare Report provides the direction of travel for this.

To that end, work is at an advanced stage in my Department in developing a Sláintecare Implementation Plan. This Plan will translate the Sláintecare Report into a detailed programme of reform over the next 10 years, with a focus on the immediate years ahead. I expect to bring these proposals to Government very shortly. Furthermore, Government gave approval last year to the establishment of a dedicated Sláintecare programme office in my Department and the recruitment of an Executive Director to lead this office. This recruitment process will conclude in the coming weeks.

Mental Health Services

53. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health his plans to address the deficiencies in child and adolescent mental health services at primary, community and acute levels; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17026/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The development of all aspects of mental health services for young people, as reflected in the agreed HSE Service Plan 2018, remains a priority for Government. Services have benefitted from the significant additional investment for mental health over recent years which has resulted in an overall provi-

sion of some €910 million for this care programme in the current year.

There are currently 69 Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) teams, 4 CAMHS units and three Paediatric Liaison Teams. Approximately 18,800 children will be referred to the CAMHS service this year, with around 14,400 to be seen by CAMHS professionals.

There are acknowledged difficulties in recruiting and retaining specialist CAMHS staff, particularly Consultant Psychiatrists. Intensive recruitment efforts are ongoing but there is currently a serious shortage of suitably qualified CAMHS Consultants both at national and European level. Steady progressing is being made by the Executive in filling approved posts for mental health. Despite increasing demands on CAMHS overall, the HSE Service Plan 2018 has a target of 72% for referrals offered or first appointment and to be seen within twelve weeks.

Individual cases professionally assessed as requiring urgent access to services receive priority.

Reducing CAMHS Waiting Lists is a priority for the HSE. The HSE Service Plan 2018 will further develop CAMHS, including delivering a major improvement initiative to increase the numbers of CAMHS referrals to be seen in 2018 by 27%, compared to 2017 (i.e. over 3,000 additional service users year on year). Improvements are also planned for Out-of- Hours liaison, seven-day response services, and progressing the CAMHS Day Hospital service.

A key initiative to improve counselling services at Primary Care level has been the recent approval by Government for the appointment of 114 Assistant Psychologists and 20 Psychologists to assist young people. These are currently being put in place by the HSE.

In addition, I have requested the HSE to examine as a matter of priority the feasibility of providing counselling support services remotely via a Tele-Psych type service at primary care centres.

Medicinal Products Availability

54. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health if pre-exposure prophylaxis will be available at an affordable level through the health service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17121/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for medicine pricing and reimbursement decisions, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. The Act specifies the criteria for decisions on the reimbursement of medicines. The 2013 Act does not give the Minister for Health any powers in this regard. The HSE does not require approval or consent from the Minister or Government when making a reimbursement decision.

HSE decisions on which medicines are reimbursed by the taxpayer are made on objective, scientific and economic grounds, on the advice of the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE). The NCPE conducts health technology assessments (HTAs) for the HSE, and makes recommendations on reimbursement to assist HSE decisions. The NCPE uses a decision framework to systematically assess whether a drug is cost-effective as a health intervention.

The NCPE indicate that a HTA was commissioned by the HSE on Emtricitabine / tenofovir disoproxil fumarate (Truvada®) on 19 July 2017. The NCPE are currently awaiting a submission from the applicant to conduct this assessment.

Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) currently has marketing authorisation in the EU and as such is available from pharmacies with a private prescription.

The HIV PrEP group continues to work towards the goal of ensuring that everyone in Ireland has access to adequate and effective HIV prevention and remains focused on making recommendations in relation to PrEP in Ireland and developing the necessary guidance to inform implementation.

Psychological Services

55. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health when the national psychology placement office will be established; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17032/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The requirements for the appointment and promotion of psychologists in the Psychological Services of the HSE have been the subject of a review. A Report of the Psychology Review Implementation Group recommended the establishment of a National Psychology Placement Office which should;

- identify appropriate health care placements
- assist with placement allocation
- maintain a single education and placement record for all trainees
- assist Garda Vetting procedures and
- examine any potential implication stemming from cited EU Directives

The HSE leadership team have accepted the recommendation and a process for implementation, including the establishment of a project team, is underway.

The HSE has advised that they are continuing to work towards the establishment of the National Psychology placement office as a matter of priority.

Primary Care Centres

56. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health his views on the move towards primary care; if additional staff will be provided for new primary care centres; if not, the centres that will not receive additional new staff; the reason therefor; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16977/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The expansion of healthcare delivery towards primary care remains a key priority for the Government and, indeed, is one of the key features of Sláintecare.

The case for the development of a more integrated, proactive and community-based care model is broadly accepted. Primary Care Centres (PCC) can facilitate such a model by offering a range of multi-disciplinary services that can provide “better care, closer to home” and so play a role in reducing the demand for hospital care.

I understand that, prior to the construction or procurement of any new PCC, extensive dialogue takes place between HSE Estates and HSE local management to ensure that provision is made for current and future staffing requirements. It is important to note that new centres

are capable of accommodating the additional staff that may be required as the plans for further shifts of activity to primary care are implemented.

As the Deputy may be aware, specific funding has been provided in recent years to recruit additional staff to support service delivery in the primary care sector as set out below:

- Speech and Language Therapists - in 2016, funding of €4m was provided for the recruitment of up to 83 additional posts, almost all of which are now in place;

- Assistant and Staff Grade Psychologists – again in 2016, some €5m was provided for the recruitment of 114 assistant psychology posts and 20 staff grade psychology posts, with the recruitment process nearly complete; and

- Occupational Therapists - in Budget 2018, over €1m in additional funding was secured as part-year funding for the provision of 40 posts, with recruitment on track for the third quarter of this year.

Addiction Treatment Services

57. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health if a request from a group (details supplied) that a separate sub-group for addiction be established to address the issue beyond a criminal and legal approach will be supported. [16982/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): The group referred to by the Deputy does not come under the remit of the Minister.

Primary Care Centres Administration

58. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health the services that will be provided in the primary care centre, Summerhill, Dublin 1; and his plans for the health centres that will be made vacant by this new facility [16983/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

Hospitals Building Programme

59. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the status of plans to build a neuro-rehabilitation unit in County Longford; the progress that has been made in relation to this matter in the past number of months; when business cases were received by the HSE in relation to the establishment of such a unit; when a decision will issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16740/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Plans for individual service and capital developments are matters for the Health Services Executive. My Department has asked the Health Service Executive to reply directly to you in respect of the issues you raise in your question.

Health Services

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60. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the case of a person (details supplied); his views in relation to their treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16530/18]

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.

HSE Staff Data

61. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the number of additional appointments at national director, assistant national director, general manager or grade VIII level the HSE expects to make during the remainder of 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17057/18]

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

Primary Care Services Provision

62. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health when parent representatives will be included in the primary care steering group in view of a motion agreed by Seanad Éireann; his views on whether parents of sick children should be represented on the steering group in view of the fact that the policies being discussed and decided will directly affect their children and that they have a unique insight and experience being full-time carers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16895/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

Home Help Service

63. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the reason Galway LHO experienced a reduction of 44,145 home help hours in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17044/18]

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 Services

64. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Health if a fixed cath lab will be provided at Sligo University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17075/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service issue, I have asked the HSE to reply to you directly.

Health Services Reports

65. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health his views on the finding of the health service capacity review that some 13,000 extra residential care beds are needed; the action being taken to address this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17087/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The recent publication of the Capacity Review report stated that if key reforms and productivity measures are implemented, the following additional capacity will be required by 2031 to meet the healthcare demands of our growing and ageing population:

- 13,000 extra residential care beds (older persons services)
- 120% increase in homecare
- 48% increase in Primary Care workforce, and
- nearly 2,600 extra acute hospital beds

The Review is clear that investment and reform across the health system, not just in acute hospitals but also in primary and social care, must happen in tandem and must be mutually supportive of each other.

The Government is committed to investing in new capacity and making tangible reforms to our model of healthcare delivery as outlined in this report. Its findings were considered in the context of the recently published National Development Plan which shows very significant increases in capital funding.

In that context, I am pleased to say that the National Development Plan provides capital funding over the next ten years for additional capacity requirements including 4,500 additional short-term and long-term beds across the public system in Community Nursing Units and other step-down facilities, as identified by the Health Service Capacity Review.

Appraisal and planning across all Community Healthcare Organisations in line with health strategies and demographic needs will inform the selection of projects for delivery of these new beds and additional capacity.

Organ Donation

66. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Health his plans to introduce the opt-out process for organ donation; the process involved in the implementation of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17012/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Government approved the preparation of a General Scheme and Heads of a Human Tissue Bill last year. The proposed legislation will include provisions for a soft opt-out organ donation system and the establishment of an Organ Donor Register to record the decision of individuals to opt-out of organ donation.

If an individual registers her/his wish to opt-out of organ donation, the family will not be approached to discuss organ donation following her/his death. If an individual is not on the register it will be presumed that she/he had no objection to donating her/his organs. However, it is proposed that the next-of-kin will always be consulted prior to removing any organ. If the next-of-kin objects to the organ donation, the donation will not proceed.

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Work on drafting the General Scheme is progressing and it is proposed to seek Government approval to publish the General Scheme shortly.

Hospital Consultant Recruitment

67. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Health his plans for the appointment of a full time consultant for the sleep clinic in St. James's Hospital, Dublin 8; when this appointment can be expected; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17005/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Work is under way on setting up a centre of excellence for narcolepsy, based in St. James's Hospital, for treating all forms of narcolepsy in adults and also in children transitioning from the paediatric services, as was committed to in the HSE 2018 National Service Plan.

In relation to the service matter raised I have asked the HSE to reply directly to you as soon as possible.

Hospitals Building Programme

68. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the timeframe for capital investment in the Midlands Regional Hospital, Mullingar. [17110/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The management of individual capital projects is a matter for the Health Service Executive. Accordingly my Department has asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to you in reply to your question regarding capital investment in the Regional Hospital, Mullingar.

Mental Health Services Data

69. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the number of children admitted to adult mental health units in CHO5 to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17099/18]

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 Services

70. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Health his plans to examine a number of proposals to improve cardiac care in the south east including the deployment of a modular laboratory that will allow for diagnostic angiograms and intervention procedures; the position regarding efforts by UHW management to recruit additional staff to extend the operation of the existing cath lab by 20%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17018/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Following an independent review of the need for a second cath lab in University Hospital Waterford (UHW), the Herity report concluded that the needs of the effective catchment population for Waterford University Hospital could be accommodated within a single cath lab. Funding has been provided to support extension

of the existing cath lab operating hours to 12 weekly sessions per week, or by 20%, as recommended in the Herity Report. Recruitment efforts to support this service extension are ongoing.

A mobile cath lab was deployed in October 2017 for an initial period of 20 weeks and this was extended in February for another 10 weeks to allow further time for the recruitment effort. A modular cath lab has also been proposed, as an interim solution pending the outcome of the National Review of Specialist Cardiac Services, and my Department is currently examining this proposal.

The aim of the National Review of Specialist Cardiac Services is to achieve optimal patient outcomes at population level with particular emphasis on the safety, quality and sustainability of the services that patients receive by establishing the need for an optimal configuration of a national adult cardiac service. In terms of scope, the National Review will cover scheduled and unscheduled hospital-based services for the diagnosis and treatment of cardiac disease in adults. The Steering Group for the review held its first meeting on 31 January last.

Hospital Groups

71. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health the groups and organisations he will meet on the consultation on Portlaoise General Hospital; and if he will meet a group (details supplied). [16239/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am committed to securing and further developing the role of the Midland Regional Hospital Portlaoise as a constituent hospital within the Dublin Midlands Hospital Group. Since 2014, the focus has been on supporting the hospital to develop and enhance management capability, implementing changes required to address clinical service deficiencies, and incorporating the hospital into the governance structures within the Dublin Midlands Hospital Group. Significant work has been undertaken to strengthen and stabilise current arrangements for services at the hospital to ensure that services that are not sustainable are discontinued and those that are, are safety assured and adequately resourced. Funding has increased by 35% relative to the 2012 budget and staffing levels have risen by 29% from the 2014 base. Governance and management arrangements in Portlaoise Hospital have been strengthened, additional clinical staff has been appointed and staff training, hospital culture and communications have improved. As outlined at a meeting with Laois Oireachtas members, no decision has been made yet on the draft Action Plan for Portlaoise Hospital and the consultation process involving local clinicians and the community is currently under consideration by my Department.

Question No. 72 answered with Question No. 28.

Medicinal Products Availability

73. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health if the Procysbi drug will be available for persons with cystinosis (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17118/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for medicine pricing and reimbursement decisions, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. As Minister for Health, I do not have any statutory power or function in relation to the reimbursement of medicines. The Act specifies the criteria for decisions on the reimbursement of medicines.

In line with the 2013 Act, if a company would like a medicine to be reimbursed by the HSE pursuant to the Community Drugs scheme, the company must first submit an application to the HSE to have the new medicine added to the Reimbursement List.

As outlined in the IPHA agreement, and in line with the 2013 Act, the HSE will decide, within 180 days of receiving the application (or a longer period if further information is sought from the company), to either add the medicine to the reimbursement list or agree to reimburse it as a hospital medicine, or refuse to reimburse the medicine. HSE decisions on which medicines are reimbursed by the taxpayer are made on objective, scientific and economic grounds, on the advice of the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE). The NCPE conducts health technology assessments (HTAs) for the HSE, and makes recommendations on reimbursement to assist HSE decisions. The NCPE uses a decision framework to systematically assess whether a drug is cost-effective as a health intervention. The HSE strives to reach a decision in as timely a manner as possible. However, because of the significant monies involved, it must ensure that the best price is achieved, as these commitments are often multi-million euro investments on an on-going basis. This can lead to a protracted deliberation process.

The NCPE completed its assessment in November 2017 and did not recommend Cysteamine (Procysbi) for reimbursement at the submitted price.

The assessment of Cysteamine (Procysbi) is on-going in keeping with the 2013 Act.

Primary Care Services Provision

74. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the steps being taken to reduce waiting times for primary care ophthalmology appointments in the north Lee local health area in which 2,382 children and young persons were waiting over a year in January 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17037/18]

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

Hospital Staff Recruitment

75. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the action being taken to recruit a new cardiologist at University Hospital Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17094/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive (HSE) to respond to you directly as soon as possible.

Paediatric Services

76. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health his views on waiting lists for children with scoliosis needing surgery; if new targets will be forthcoming for 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16976/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The long-term strategy to develop sustainable scoliosis services from 2018 has been prioritised by the Department of Health and the HSE in the 2018 HSE National Service Plan.

€9 million funding has been provided in 2018 to improve access to paediatric orthopaedic services including scoliosis. The 2018 HSE National Service Plan includes a commitment from the HSE to continue to improve access to paediatric orthopaedics, including surgery for scoliosis, in conjunction with the Children's Hospital Group, to achieve clinically appropriate waiting times. This will be underpinned by the development of a standardised pathway of care for children and adolescents with scoliosis which will be evidence-based and patient-centred.

The HSE, in their Service Plan, has also committed to the development of a service for young adults with scoliosis in the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital, Dublin, and Cap-pagh Orthopaedic Hospital for patients transferring from paediatric services.

In addition, a Paediatric Scoliosis Services Co-Design group is in place, which includes clinicians, hospital staff and representatives from the scoliosis advocacy groups, to design a comprehensive, contemporary, and patient-centred approach to the delivery of scoliosis services.

It is estimated that in 2018 the Children's Hospital Group will carry out 196 spinal fusions and that 51 procedures will be outsourced. This activity will ensure that by the end of 2018 there will be no patient waiting over the 4-month administrative target (where clinically appropriate).

Home Help Service

77. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health the reason the Dublin south west and Dublin west LHO areas experienced a reduction of 70,567 home help hours in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17100/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Health Strategies

78. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Health the additional resources allocated to community based programmes aimed at healthy food and healthy living as contained in the Obesity Policy and Action Plan 2016-2025; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8928/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): Since the launch of Healthy Ireland, expenditure on its implementation from within the budget of the Department of Health has been the following:

Year	Expenditure
2013	€89,315
2014	€586,470
2015	€607,707
2016	€1,156,405
2017	€996,837
2018	€22,307

In addition to the expenditure noted above, other expenditure arising within the Department could also be described as "Healthy Ireland" depending on classification. It is not possible to

disaggregate this expenditure with respect to obesity alone. The approximate costs associated with both development and publication of the new Health Eating Guidelines & Food Pyramid and the national Obesity Policy & Action Plan were €55,719 and €19,186 respectively. In addition new Nutrition Standards for schools, with an initial focus on school meal programmes funded by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, have also been developed. These Nutrition Standards were published in September 2017. The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection has informed my Department that the total budget for school meals this year is €54m.

Separate to the expenditure detailed above, the Government, in July 2016, approved the creation of a Healthy Ireland Fund and subsequently provided an initial allocation of €5 million in Budget 2017 to kick-start its establishment. The Fund was announced by An Taoiseach on Monday 2 October 2017. €5 million was allocated in Budget 2018.

The Healthy Ireland Fund will help drive the cross-governmental approach as set out in the Healthy Ireland Framework to improve the mental and physical health and wellbeing of the population. The main aim of the Fund is to support innovative, cross-sectoral, evidence based projects, programmes and initiatives that support the implementation of the key national policies in various areas including Obesity and Physical Activity. In particular the Fund will be for projects and programmes aimed at children and young people and their families, and supporting communities and vulnerable groups who are at most risk of experiencing health inequalities.

Finally, as some of the issues raised in the Deputy's questions are service matters, they have been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

National Drugs Strategy

79. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health if the new programme to promote community awareness of alcohol related harm from the last quarter of 2017 to the summer of 2018 will be fast tracked; if the associated funding will be increased from €0.25 million to €0.5 million in view of the fact it will be a full year since the new national drug and alcohol strategy was published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16290/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): The national drug strategy, Reducing Harm Supporting Recovery. A Health-led response to drug and alcohol use in Ireland 2017-2015, aims to protect the public from threats to health and wellbeing related to substance misuse by preventing early use of alcohol and other drugs among young people, influencing behaviours and challenging social norms and attitudes.

Substance misuse prevention strategies targeting families, schools and communities are an effective way of promoting health and wellbeing among the population. Raising awareness of the risk of substance use and increasing understanding of the harmful effects of substance misuse is an important part of the work of prevention.

Prevention is a collaborative effort involving a range of stakeholders. Prevention programmes should be evidence-based, adhere to quality standards and involve participants in programme design and implementation.

To support this objective, my Department is developing a new programme to promote community awareness of alcohol-related harm. An additional €0.25m will be made available in 2018 to fund phase 1 of the scheme, with the expectation that this will increase to €1m in 2019. It is anticipated that the scheme will commence in the last quarter of 2018.

My Department is undertaking preparatory work to develop the programme and will consult with relevant stakeholders, including the bodies overseeing the national drugs strategy. It is important that the additional resources are used carefully to maximise the impact. I will provide further details on the programme when this work is completed.

General Practitioner Services

80. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health if his Department monitors the number of general practitioner practices that are unable to take on new patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17097/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question relates to operational matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Hospital Services

81. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health his plans for the provision of a modular cath laboratory which would allow for the performance of PCI in addition to or to replace the mobile diagnostic unit at University Hospital Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17014/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Following an independent review of the need for a second cath lab in University Hospital Waterford (UHW), the Herity report concluded that the needs of the effective catchment population for Waterford University Hospital could be accommodated within a single cath lab. Funding has been provided to support extension of the existing cath lab operating hours to 12 weekly sessions per week, or by 20%, as recommended in the Herity Report. Recruitment efforts to support this service extension are ongoing.

A mobile cath lab was deployed in October 2017 for an initial period of 20 weeks and this was extended in February for another 10 weeks to allow further time for the recruitment effort. A modular cath lab has also been proposed, as an interim solution pending the outcome of the National Review of Specialist Cardiac Services, and my Department is currently examining this proposal.

The aim of the National Review of Specialist Cardiac Services is to achieve optimal patient outcomes at population level with particular emphasis on the safety, quality and sustainability of the services that patients receive by establishing the need for an optimal configuration of a national adult cardiac service. In terms of scope, the National Review will cover scheduled and unscheduled hospital-based services for the diagnosis and treatment of cardiac disease in adults. The Steering Group for the review held its first meeting on 31 January last.

Hospital Services

82. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) has been refused surgery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16237/18]

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

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Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Ambulance Service Response Times

83. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if delayed ambulance response times will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16831/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service issue, I have asked the HSE to reply to you directly.

Pharmacy Services

84. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to introduce a scheme put forward by a union (details supplied) by which women could access contraception directly from their community pharmacist without prescription and without charge regardless of eligibility in order to improve access to contraceptives. [17009/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department received a proposal from the Irish Pharmacy Union recently in relation to provision of contraception services through pharmacies. The proposal will be considered in due course.

Emergency Departments

85. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 393 of 26 September 2017, the position regarding the new emergency department in UHG; the timeframe for delivery; if the short to medium plan for managing the demand for both scheduled and unscheduled care for UHG and Merlin Park Hospital has been developed; if so, if he will provide a copy of the plan; when it started and finished, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17115/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service issue, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Services

86. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Health when the proposed new cystic fibrosis unit in Beaumont Hospital will be operational; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17107/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Programme for Partnership Government contains a Government commitment regarding the development of a dedicated Cystic Fibrosis (CF) Unit in Beaumont Hospital, to be progressed in the context of a CF Model of Care.

This CF Unit capital project will thus be underpinned by the “Model of Care for People with Cystic Fibrosis in Ireland” which is being developed by the National Clinical Programme for Cystic Fibrosis (NCPCF). The Model of Care will set out standards and requirements for the physical and human resources to be provided for treatment of cystic fibrosis patients from a national perspective.

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform governs the processes surrounding the development of healthcare projects by way of guidelines, principally the Public Spending Code. Further rigour is demanded by, and set out in, relevant EU Directives. All proposed projects must be submitted to the HSE’s Capital and Property Steering Committee for approval and prioritisation prior to inclusion in its multi-annual Capital Plans.

In terms of the progression of the CF Unit capital project I am happy to confirm that it has been included in the National Planning Framework under Project Ireland 2040, as well as being recommended for inclusion in the capital plan by the HSE National Capital Steering Committee.

Primary Care Centres Provision

87. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Health the status of the construction programme for primary care centres through the National Development Plan 2018-2027, with specific reference to the Fingal area of Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16707/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I recently officially opened one of the largest primary care centres in the country at Coolock on the northside of Dublin.

In line with health strategy a decisive shift towards primary care is required to meet growing demands for health and social care services.

The construction programme for primary care centres will continue throughout the National Development Plan 2018 – 2027. The National Development Plan will support the completion of projects currently in construction and planning, and will meet the future health needs of the population. This primary care centre programme will also include provision of diagnostic facilities in the community.

The HSE will continue to pursue the delivery of primary care centres in line with national requirements of appraisal, design, planning, tender and construction.

The Health Service Executive has been successful in developing a network of primary care centres across the country. 114 primary care centres are now operational. 6 have opened so far this year. Another primary care centre became partially operational this month and a further 13 are scheduled to open in 2018.

Home Help Service

88. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Health the reason the Dublin south east, south city and Dún Laoghaire LHO areas experienced a reduction of 36,236 home help

hours in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17047/18]

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.

Hospitals Building Programme

89. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health when work will commence on the two new Dublin hospitals promised in the National Development Plan 2018-2027; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17101/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Development Plan provides €10.9 billion to invest in infrastructure, equipment and additional service capacity for the public health sector.

The National Development Plan is a ten year plan which will provide the capital funding to develop dedicated ambulatory elective-only hospital facilities in Dublin, Cork and Galway. We must ensure that we carefully plan the use of this capital funding so as to meet the populations health needs and achieve value for money.

As is to be expected with a ten year plan, many proposals, including a dedicated ambulatory elective-only hospital facilities in Dublin, are at a very early stage and will require to progress through appraisal, planning, design and tender before a firm location, timeline or funding required can be established.

Hospitals Building Programme

90. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the timeframe for the proposed four new elective only hospital facilities nationwide; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17091/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Development Plan is a ten year plan which will provide the capital funding to develop dedicated ambulatory elective-only hospital facilities.

We must ensure that we carefully plan the use of this capital funding so as to meet the populations health needs and achieve value for money.

New dedicated ambulatory elective-only hospital facilities will be delivered in Dublin, Cork and Galway.

These facilities will provide high volume, low complexity procedures on a day and outpatient basis, together with a range of ambulatory diagnostic services.

The aim is to both increase capacity in the hospital system and provide a better separation of scheduled and unscheduled care, in line with the recommendations of the Health Service Capacity Review and the Sláintecare Report. They will provide increased, protected capacity for elective treatment and free up capacity in major acute hospitals to address higher complexity and emergency care.

These new standalone ambulatory, elective-only hospital and diagnostic facilities will be

developed in line with hospital groups' strategic plans.

As is to be expected with a ten year plan, many proposals, including proposals for dedicated ambulatory elective-only hospital facilities, are at a very early stage and will require to progress through appraisal, planning, design and tender before a firm location, timeline or funding required can be established.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

91. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health his plans to use a drug approval and reimbursement system for MS drugs similar to that in Germany (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16408/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for medicine pricing and reimbursement decisions, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. As Minister for Health, I do not have any statutory power or function in relation to the reimbursement of medicines. The Act specifies the criteria for decisions on the reimbursement of medicines.

In line with the 2013 Act, if a company would like a medicine to be reimbursed by the HSE pursuant to the Community Drugs scheme, the company must first submit an application to the HSE to have the new medicine added to the Reimbursement List.

As outlined in the IPHA agreement, and in line with the 2013 Act, the HSE will decide, within 180 days of receiving the application (or a longer period if further information is sought from the company), to either add the medicine to the reimbursement list or agree to reimburse it as a hospital medicine, or refuse to reimburse the medicine. HSE decisions on which medicines are reimbursed by the taxpayer are made on objective, scientific and economic grounds, on the advice of the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE). The NCPE conducts health technology assessments (HTAs) for the HSE, and makes recommendations on reimbursement to assist HSE decisions. The NCPE uses a decision framework to systematically assess whether a drug is cost-effective as a health intervention. The HSE strives to reach a decision in as timely a manner as possible. However, because of the significant monies involved, it must ensure that the best price is achieved, as these commitments are often multi-million euro investments on an on-going basis. This can lead to a protracted deliberation process.

I am keen to engage with Industry and to explore ways in which new medicines might be more easily introduced in Ireland. However, any innovative approaches that may be tabled must be compatible with the statutory provisions which are in place and must also recognise the fundamental pricing/funding issues in the context of finite Exchequer resources.

Mental Health Services Staff

92. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the way in which the clinical staffing levels for the community psychiatry of old age mental health services in CHO7 compare to that recommended under A Vision for Change; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17102/18]

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.

Emergency Departments Waiting Times

93. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Health the reason 519 persons over 75 years of age waited more than 24 hours in the emergency departments of Beaumont and the Mater Hospitals during the first two months of 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17106/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Against a background of growing demand for unscheduled care and high acute hospital occupancy rates, Government provided €30 million in 2017 and a further €40 million in 2018 for measures to increase acute hospital capacity and alleviate overcrowding in Emergency Departments (EDs). Almost 50% of this funding was used to deliver home support packages and transitional care beds to reduce the incidence of delayed discharges. Furthermore, over 200 beds have been opened this winter and more beds are due to come on stream later in the year.

Notwithstanding the increased level of resources provided, this winter has been particularly difficult for our health services with ED attendances up 3.7%, admissions up 3.3% and trolleys up 13.1% during the first quarter of the year, as compared to the same period in 2017. In addition, ED attendances by patients 75 years and older rose by 5.9% and admissions by 7% in the same period.

In relation to the specific issue raised by the Deputy regarding waiting times at Beaumont and the Mater Hospital Emergency Departments, as this is a service matter, I have referred it to the HSE for a direct response.

Hospitals Funding

94. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health if approval will be forthcoming for a request for additional funding of €1.8 million from Letterkenny University Hospital to enable it to open an additional 20 bed ward and staff it appropriately in order to address a chronic issue with persons waiting on trolleys for hospital admission; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16351/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Against a background of growing demand for unscheduled care and high acute hospital occupancy rates, Government provided €30 million in 2017 and a further €40 million in 2018 for measures to increase acute hospital capacity and alleviate overcrowding in Emergency Departments. Almost 50% of this funding was used to deliver home support packages and transitional care beds to reduce the incidence of delayed discharges. Furthermore, over 200 beds have been opened this winter and more beds are due to come on stream later in the year.

Notwithstanding the increased level of resources provided, this winter has been particularly difficult for our health services with ED attendances up 3.7% and admissions up 3.3% during the first quarter of the year, as compared to the same period in 2017.

In the light of the conclusions of the Health Service Capacity Review that the system will need nearly 2,600 additional acute hospital beds by 2031, I have asked my Department to work with the HSE to identify the location and mix of beds across the hospital system which can be opened and staffed this year and into 2019 in order to improve preparedness for Winter 2018/2019.

I understand that Saolta Hospital Group has submitted proposals to the HSE in relation to

opening additional capacity at Letterkenny University Hospital in the context of this initiative and that the HSE is currently assessing these proposals.

As this is a service matter, I have also referred this PQ for a direct reply to the Deputy.

Respite Care Services Provision

95. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health the status of respite care service provision by HSE disability services in County Wexford; if he is satisfied that the needs of vulnerable families are being met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17013/18]

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

The Programme for Partnership Government states that the Government wishes to provide more accessible respite care to facilitate full support for people with a disability.

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

Primary Care Centres

96. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if the new primary care centre in Mullingar is now fully occupied; his plans for further primary care centres in counties Westmeath and Longford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17111/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the HSE has responsibility for the provision, along with the maintenance and operation of Primary Care Centres and other Primary Care facilities, the Executive has been asked to reply directly to the Deputy.

General Practitioner Services

97. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether the general practitioner workforce can be increased by 1,000 as recommended by the Health Service Capacity Review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17093/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): General Practitioners play an important role in the primary care system. The number of General Practitioners on the specialist register continues to increase – up from 2,270 in 2010 to 3,637 at the end of 2017 and the number of GPs contracted by the HSE under the GMS scheme has also risen from 2,098 in 2008 to 2,485 as of 1st April 2018.

The 2018 Health Service Capacity Review proposes a number of estimates of between 4,790 and 4,970 General Practitioners that may be required by 2031. While it is important to note that these estimates are based on statistical models of demand and are subject to certain

assumptions, the Government is aware of the manpower issues facing general practice and has taken steps to increase the numbers of General Practice training places accordingly.

In 2009, there were 120 General Practice training places available and this year it is expected that over 190 training places will be filled, an increase of around 60% over a nine year period. The number of training places will rise to 259 in coming years. There were over 400 applications for the 2018 training programme which is a significant increase of almost 50% on the number of applications from 2017.

The Government is also committed to engaging with GP representatives on the development of a package of measures and reforms to modernise the 1989 GMS contract. Our goal is to develop a contractual framework that has a population health focus, providing in particular for health promotion, disease prevention and for the structured care of chronic conditions. This will enable general practitioners to better meet the needs of patients and will also promote general practice as a viable and rewarding career for both existing doctors and future medical graduates.

Hospitals Building Programme

98. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Health the status of the development of elective only hospitals as outlined in the National Development Plan 2018-2027; if the possibility of locating the elective only hospital for Dublin in Fingal has been considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16708/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Development Plan provides €10.9 billion to invest in infrastructure, equipment and additional service capacity for the public health sector.

The National Development Plan is a ten year plan which will provide the capital funding to develop dedicated ambulatory elective-only hospital facilities. We must ensure that we carefully plan the use of this capital funding so as to meet the populations health needs and achieve value for money.

As is to be expected with a ten year plan, many proposals, including an elective-only hospital in Dublin, are at a very early stage and will require to progress through appraisal, planning, design and tender before a firm location, timeline or funding required can be established.

Hospitals Funding

99. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health the engagement he has had with the HSE and Saolta in relation to a request to make additional funding of €1.8 million available to Letterkenny University Hospital to hire the staff necessary to enable it to open an additional 20 bed ward; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16352/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service issue, I have asked the HSE to reply to you directly.

Disability Support Services Funding

100. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the reason no provision was made in the 2018 HSE Service Plan for an increase in personal assistant hours for

adults with a physical and or sensory disability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17104/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Health Service Executive (HSE) is committed to protecting the level of Personal Assistant services available to persons with disabilities.

In the 2018 National Service Plan, the HSE's priority is to provide 1.46 million hours of personal assistance to more than 2,000 people with a disability, representing an increase of 60,000 hours over the 2017 target of 1.4 million hours.

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

Medicinal Products

101. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the status of the discussions regarding Kuvan; the timeframe for a decision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16243/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines under the community drug schemes, in accordance with the provisions of the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for reply to the Deputy.

Occupational Therapy Waiting Lists

102. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health the waiting times for occupational therapy in the Dublin 7 and Dublin 15 areas. [17119/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

Health Services

103. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Health the way in which the Connecting for Life local plans are progressing; and the number which have been and will be launched [16232/18]

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.

Respite Care Services

104. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if a company (details supplied) plans to close a number of respite centres on bank holiday weekends in County Galway during 2018 due to a lack of funding and resources; if so, the alternative placements that will be pro-

vided for service users; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16918/18]

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

The Programme for Partnership Government states that the Government wishes to provide more accessible respite care to facilitate full support for people with a disability.

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

Nursing Staff Remuneration

105. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the measures being taken to address problems regarding pay and pay equality for nurses in view of the recruitment and retention crisis for nursing and midwifery staff; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16978/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In terms of pay, this Government has ratified the measures agreed in the Public Service Stability Agreement (PSSA) and provided a statutory roadmap for the unwinding of FEMPI. This includes a series of salary increases that will see public servants, including nurses, receiving on average a 7% increase over the lifetime of the agreement. The Agreement commits to 90% pay restoration by the end of 2020. In addition to this, a number of health-related allowances have been restored and nursing staff have benefitted from this.

Last year, the Public Service Pay Commission (PSPC) recognised that nurses and midwives are one of the grades that have recruitment and retention difficulties. The PSPC is currently undertaking its second phase of work, and is adopting a modular approach. The first module now underway is focussing on nurses and midwives, as well as other health grades. Their first report is due in June and I look forward to recommendations in relation to nurses and midwives.

The Government and the HSE remain committed to recruiting and retaining nurses and midwives in the public health service. As part of the Nursing Recruitment and Retention Agreement with the INMO and SIPTU, the HSE agreed to appoint 1,224 additional nurses and midwives in 2017. The HSE is finalising the report setting out progress on implementation of the Agreement as at end December 2017. Indications are that there has been significant growth in the appointment of nurses and midwives in the final months of the year with 942 WTE of the 1,224 posts filled (including student nurses) or 69% (847 WTE) excluding the student nurses. The HSE remain committed to the Agreement and efforts will continue to fill the remaining posts.

Question No. 106 answered with Question No. 49.

Home Care Packages

107. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which home care packages are being made available to persons that may otherwise need hospitalisation; the

number approved in each of the regions to date; the extent of the funding required or pending; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17025/18]

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.

EU Enlargement

108. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on Serbia and Montenegro joining the EU; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17141/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Enlargement remains an important policy for the future stability of the European Union and its neighbouring countries. Enhancing the European perspective of the Western Balkans is a key strategic priority for the Bulgarian Presidency. The Strategy for the Western Balkans was published by the European Commission on 6 February. It confirmed the European perspective of the region and set out an indicative accession date of 2025 for Serbia and Montenegro, while emphasising that this perspective was extremely ambitious and strictly contingent on countries meeting the relevant accession criteria. In particular, the Strategy underlined the rule of law, the fight against corruption and organised crime, and good neighbourly relations as being fundamental for the Western Balkans to make progress on their accession paths. Montenegro has made substantial progress on its European path. It is considerably ahead of other candidates in terms of open chapters of the *acquis* in accession negotiations; 30 chapters have already been opened (of which three have been provisionally closed) and just three have yet to be opened. Serbia is also making good progress; it has opened 12 chapters in negotiations (of which two have been provisionally closed); 23 have yet to be opened. The EU-facilitated Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue, aimed at normalising relations between Kosovo and Serbia, has seen renewed momentum this year, and progress in these negotiations will be key for Serbia to advance its membership aspirations. The European Union published country reports on each of the candidate and potential candidate countries on 17 April, and these confirm that while there is still a great deal of work to do, both Serbia and Montenegro are well advanced on their European path.

Ireland is a strong supporter of the enlargement process, viewing it as a transformative driver for stability and peace. We believe that the European perspective of the Western Balkan countries, including Serbia and Montenegro, must be credible, in order to advance the stability and security of the region. Equally, we are clear that candidate countries must, in meeting all the requirements of the accession process, give the rule of law, justice and fundamental rights the utmost priority in terms of reform.

Ireland is therefore strongly supportive of the accession of Serbia and Montenegro, provided that all criteria are completely and unequivocally fulfilled. This is more important than accession dates per se. But we see the indicative 2025 date as offering an achievable, albeit ambitious, timeline for both Serbia and Montenegro.

Human Rights Cases

109. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the trial of persons accused of killing a person (details supplied) will take place in June 2018; and if an Irish diplomat will attend part of the

trial. [17187/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am aware of the case to which the Deputy refers and of its importance for human rights defenders who are working in the field of environmental and indigenous rights in Honduras. I am also aware of the difficult situation which currently pertains for human rights defenders in Honduras more generally. Officials of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade met just last week in Dublin with a Honduran lawyer and human rights defender who has had to leave the country due to fears for his personal safety. Officials at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade regularly raise issues relating to human rights in Honduras both at EU and UN level, including through direct contact with the EU Delegation in Tegucigalpa.

Honduras was last reviewed under the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review mechanism in May 2015. Ireland intervened then to express its concern at the climate of violence and insecurity in which human rights defenders operate in Honduras, and recommended that adequate financial and human resources be allocated to ensure the implementation of legislation protecting human rights defenders and journalists.

Ireland has also raised the difficulties facing human rights defenders in Honduras in public statements at the UN Human Rights Council and at the UN Commission on the Status of Women.

Senior officials also discussed the situation faced by human rights defenders in Central America with the Executive Director of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights during his visit to Dublin in 2016.

Ireland does not have any diplomatic representation in Honduras but we are following developments closely and will have the opportunity to hear from EU colleagues who are present on the ground as to developments in this case.

In keeping with Ireland's commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights, we will continue to raise concerns regarding threats to the work of human rights defenders in discussions on Honduras at EU and international level.

Freedom of Speech

110. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the Polish Government has introduced a new law which criminalises persons that reference Polish complicity or involvement in the Holocaust during the Second World War; his views on whether this is an attempt to rewrite history; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17188/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The legislation to which the Deputy refers is an amendment to Poland's Act on the Institute of National Remembrance – Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation Act – which criminalises public claims of responsibility or co-responsibility by the Polish nation or the Republic of Poland for Nazi crimes. The amendment was signed by the President of Poland, Andrzej Duda, on 6 February 2018. President Duda has also referred the amendment to Poland's Constitutional Tribunal to examine whether freedom of speech is limited in an unconstitutional manner by the provisions of the amended law. It is not known when the Constitutional Tribunal will make a decision on this matter.

I am aware that concerns have been raised about elements of the legislation, and that a high-

level dialogue on historical issues is in place between Poland and Israel. I hope that Poland and Israel can reach agreement on this matter through their ongoing dialogue.

Human Rights

111. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the criminalisation of resistance to the installation of a dam (details supplied) in Mexico; and if he will raise the issue with his Mexican counterpart. [17189/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am aware of the case to which the Deputy refers, as well as other difficulties faced by human rights defenders in Mexico. Our Embassy in Mexico City is monitoring developments in this particular case. In addition, I understand that this matter has already been raised by members of the EU-Mexico Joint Parliamentary Committee, including through submissions to President Enrique Peña Nieto and meetings with human rights defenders on the ground.

In keeping with Ireland's commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights, we remain active in the field through the work of our Embassy in Mexico and through collaboration with our European and international partners. We have engaged extensively with civil society, including providing financial support through the In Country Micro Project Scheme (ICMPS)

Finally it is important to note that we contribute to the EU-Mexico high level dialogue on human rights which has an active civil society dialogue component and that the modernisation of the EU-Mexico Global Agreement will include updated provisions on human rights.

Passport Applications Fees

112. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade when he plans to reinstate the free passport for old age pensioners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17249/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The cost of the standard ten year adult Irish passport compares favourably with many other jurisdictions. At a cost of €80, which breaks down to €8 per year, the Irish passport fee compares with approximately €8.70 per year for a British passport, €8.60 per year for a French passport, €8.9 per year for renewal of an American passport and €17.70 per year for an Australian passport. Given that the production cost of a passport is the same, irrespective of validity, and given that any shortfall in revenue or additional costs would have to be met by the taxpayer, I do not have any plans at this time to waive or reduce the application fee charged to older applicants.

Good Friday Agreement

113. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he discussed with the British Secretary of State the need to resume talks between the Irish and British Governments and the political parties in Northern Ireland to restore the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17323/18]

114. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he discussed with the British Secretary of State plans to convene the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17324/18]

19 April 2018

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 113 and 114 together.

Over the course of many months, the Irish and British Governments, as co-guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement, have worked tirelessly to support and facilitate the parties in their efforts to form an Executive.

The devolved, power-sharing institutions of the Good Friday Agreement are the best means for achieving accountable, representative decision-making for all the people of Northern Ireland.

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

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

I remain in very regular contact with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Karen Bradley, whom I met in Belfast on 10 April and again in London on 16 April. We spoke about the importance of the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement and reiterated that the best place for decisions on Northern Ireland to be made are the power-sharing devolved institutions.

I have also discussed with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland the scope for convening the British Irish Intergovernmental Conference (BIIGC) at this time, as part of the work by the two Governments, as co-guarantors of the Agreement, to chart a way beyond the current impasse with the devolved institutions.

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

The Good Friday Agreement is 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. As co-guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement, both Governments have an obligation to uphold and protect the letter and spirit of that Agreement and we are continuing to work to that end.

Fiscal Data

115. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 74 of 30 November 2017, if the portion of the Exchequer capital spending in 2019, 2020 and 2021 per Table 3.1 is in addition to that previously allocated and so would not be accounted for in the net fiscal space referenced (details supplied); the adjusted net fiscal space for each of the three years accounting for the Exchequer spending in Table 3.1; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17150/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Apart from the net increase explained in the following table, the Exchequer gross voted allocations in Table 3.1 of the National Devel-

opment Plan (NDP) are consistent with previous allocations as per Table 8 in the Economic and Fiscal outlook document for Budget 2018, when account is taken of the technical adjustments arising from the passing of the Water Services Act 2017. A key element of these technical adjustments was that domestic water services provided by Irish Water are funded through voted expenditure. So for 2018, the change in capital allocations from €5.3bn to €5.8bn was €500m as set out on page three of the Revised Estimates for Public Services 2018.

As these are simply reallocations of the source of funding of capital expenditure, with no resulting increase in overall general government expenditure, this has no impact on the general government balance.

As there was no change to general government expenditure, there was no impact on fiscal space for 2018.

This change also carries through to 2019, 2020 and 2021. Further to this, the NDP announced four funds which will begin operating from 2019. These are the Rural, Urban, Innovation and Climate Action Funds.

The funds will be partly covered by an unallocated capital reserve in the first instance, leaving an additional cost, which will both pre-commit unallocated fiscal space and worsen the Exchequer Borrowing Requirement (EBR).

The net nominal EBR increase resulting from the three funds is set out in the last row of the following table.

New Funds, € millions	2019	2020	2021
Rural	55	80	80
Urban	100	120	150
Innovation	20	30	40
TOTAL	175	230	270
Less Capital Reserve	-98	-136	-94
Net Increase	77	94	176

As the Climate Action Fund, set out in the following table, will be funded from the National Oil Reserves Agency (NORA) levy, it will have no impact on Voted Expenditure or the EBR.

€ millions	2019	2020	2021
Climate Action Fund	20	30	40

In calculating the impact on net fiscal space under the Expenditure Benchmark, it is assumed that both the Urban and Rural Funds will be recorded as gross fixed capital formation (i.e. subject to 'capital smoothing' over four years) and that the Innovation and Climate Action Funds will be treated as capital grants (i.e. not smoothed). A further assumption is that the funding from the capital reserve will offset the Rural and Urban Funds.

Should the operation of the funds change these assumptions then the figures that follow will need to be amended.

The cost, in fiscal space terms, of the four funds is therefore:

€ millions	2019	2020	2021
Fiscal space used	54	36	54

While updated estimates of fiscal space will be published in the Summer Economic State-

ment 2018, I have repeatedly said that budgetary policy will be framed in the context of what is right for the economy, what is sustainable and not by what is legally allowed. The Government will not repeat the budgetary mistakes of the past.

Departmental Schemes

116. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to reintroduce the vehicle scrappage scheme. [17169/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy will be aware that a vehicle scrappage scheme was previously in place from January 2010 to June 2011. From January 2010 and December 2010, Vehicle Registration Tax (VRT) relief of up to €1,500 was provided where a car of 10 years or older was scrapped and a new car in CO2 emissions bands A or B was purchased. A reduced VRT relief of €1,250 was in place between January 2011 and June 2011.

I have no plans to reintroduce such a vehicle scrappage scheme. With approximately 75% of new cars registered for VRT purposes being in CO2 emissions bands A1-A4, and EU Regulations requiring vehicle manufacturers to progressively reduce the average CO2 emissions of their vehicles, I am satisfied that there will be further progress towards achieving a lower-emissions profile of vehicles in Ireland.

EU Budget Contribution

117. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Finance if he will address a matter (details supplied) relating to an increase in the overall contribution to the EU budget as a percentage of GDP. [17278/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy may be aware, the European Commission is yet to publish its proposal on the post-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), which is due to be released in early May. Once the proposal has been published, officials from across all Departments will study it in-detail to assess its implications for Ireland. The MFF will then be subject to intense negotiations over the subsequent 12-24 months; once a final agreement is reached we will have a clearer understanding of the impacts on Ireland.

In addition, given the UK's current status as one of the largest net contributors to the EU Budget, Brexit will have a significant impact on EU Budget funding and expenditure and may need to be mitigated by either increased contributions from other Member States, reductions in EU funding programmes, or a combination of both. However, as the Deputy will appreciate, Brexit negotiations are currently on-going, therefore, 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.

Financial Services Regulation

118. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the policy of applying the Central Bank's consumer protection code to personal contract plans (details supplied). [17316/18]

121. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the recent reports from the Central Bank and the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission on

personal contract plans; the steps he has taken to date with regard to the plans; his plans in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17251/18]

122. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance his views on whether the consumer protection code should be applied to personal contract plans as recommended by the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission; when he plans to make such changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17252/18]

123. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if the Central Bank will publish data on personal contract plans on a regular basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17253/18]

127. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to review the Consumer Credit Act 1995; and the timeframe for such a review to ensure its suitability for new forms of car finance as recommended by the CCPC. [17296/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 118, 121 to 123, inclusive, and 127 together.

As the Deputy will be aware Personal Contract Plans (PCP) are a form of Hire Purchase and both the Central Bank and the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) have certain functions and legal powers in relation to the provision of hire-purchase agreements. In the State PCP finance is underwritten by standard financial institutions, manufacturer banks, and special purpose institutions which exclusively offer motor finance.

The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) undertook the first comprehensive study of the Personal Contract Plans (PCP) market in the State. As part of its study the CCPC issued detailed questionnaires to all the financial institutions that underwrite PCP finance in the State. This allowed the CCPC to compile, for the first time, primary data relating to the number and value of PCP finance contracts issued. The report was published on the 6 March 2018 and is available at www.ccpc.ie.

The Deputy may also be aware that an Economic Letter on this area was published by the Central Bank on 28 March. This provides further comprehensive data on the PCP market in Ireland, where at the end 2017 PCP finance accounted for 43% (€1.2 billion) of car-related bank debt. The Economic Letter is available at www.centralbank.ie.

My officials will examine these publications and give careful consideration to what actions, if any, would be appropriate.

The Central Bank has informed me that the Bank publishes car finance data, which contains information on PCP contract numbers and PCP lending amounts. These data are contained in Table A.19 of the Credit and Banking Statistics. Data are currently available for the period between 2012 and December 2017. I understand that the Central Bank is currently developing a regular publication and reporting of this which will begin in Q3 2018.

On the issue more generally, the Central Bank regulates financial services institutions as set out under legislation but does not regulate individual financial products. Under current legislation (Consumer Credit Act 1995), the CCPC has responsibility for authorising and supervising the credit intermediaries which typically sell PCP contracts to consumers, including garages and retailers. The CCPC provides licenses to credit intermediaries and keeps an online list of credit intermediaries holding a valid authorisation which is available on the CCPC website www.ccpc.ie.

The CCPC also deals with complaints about the advertising of Credit Agreements, issuing

Pawnbrokers licenses and the advertising of car finance on credit intermediary websites and in the media. The CCPC's remit is limited to authorisation, as opposed to having a regulatory role for PCPs. It also has a specific statutory remit to provide personal finance information and education to assist consumers.

My Department continues to keep financial legislation relating to consumer protection under review to ensure consumers are protected. However, the Consumer Credit Act 1995 and the CCPC itself both come under the aegis of my colleague the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation.

Stamp Duty

119. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to address issues (details supplied) relating to the sale of land; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17176/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I assume the Deputy is referring to the stamp duty farm consolidation relief which was introduced in Finance Act 2017, and which provides for a reduced rate of stamp duty on certain farm consolidation transactions. This measure is subject to a commencement order after a full consideration of any administrative or EU state-aid requirements.

For the relief to operate, there must be both a sale and a purchase of land within a period of 24 months of each other. Where other qualifying conditions are satisfied, stamp duty will be paid only to the extent that the value of the land that is purchased exceeds the value of the land that is sold. A reduced rate of 1% will be charged on the excess, if any, of the purchase value. If the sale takes place before the purchase, then relief will be given at the time of purchase. However, if the purchase takes place first, then stamp duty will have to be paid but can subsequently be refunded when the sale takes place.

A number of qualifying conditions must be satisfied before the relief can apply. The most important condition is that Teagasc must issue a certificate stating that a sale and purchase or an exchange of farmland was made for farm consolidation purposes. This is the certificate that is currently required in relation to the capital gains tax relief available on farm consolidations. The criteria to be used by Teagasc for this purpose and the information to be supplied to Teagasc are contained in guidelines published by the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

A purchaser of farmland must retain ownership of the farmland for a period of five years and must use the land for farming. Where any part of the land is disposed of before the end of this five-year holding period, the stamp duty relieved can subsequently be recovered by Revenue, or partly recovered as appropriate.

The measure will apply to all transactions which took place after on or after 1 January 2018 and on or before 31 December 2020, so farmers who consolidate their holdings prior to the commencement of the relief, but within those dates, will still be eligible.

Tax Agreements

120. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Finance the status of discussions with the Brazilian authorities to remove Ireland from a blacklist of tax havens; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17246/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Irish Government was deeply disappointed by Brazilian Federal Revenue Service's decision to include Ireland on the List of Countries with Favoured Taxation and Tax Regimes. Inclusion on the list fundamentally misrepresents Ireland and the Irish tax system.

Ireland's interaction with Brazil on this important issue is being led by the Irish Ambassador to Brazil. Department of Finance officials and officials from the Revenue Commissioners continue to be actively engaged in supporting the Irish Ambassador to Brazil in our efforts to seek Ireland's removal from the List. Officials from the Department of Finance have met with their Brazilian counterparts to address any concerns the Brazilian authorities have.

In addition, Minister of State Joe McHugh TD travelled to Brazil as part of the "Promote Ireland" Programme for St Patrick's Day. Minister McHugh engaged directly with the Head of the Brazilian Revenue Service in a meeting specific to this matter.

Arising from the meeting the fundamental issue remains that Ireland's 12.5% headline rate was at odds with existing Brazilian tax legislation (which sets a 17% threshold) which means that Ireland will remain on the list, regardless that Ireland is fully compliant with all international best practices in the areas of tax transparency and exchange of information and are one of only 22 jurisdictions to be ranked as fully Compliant by the Global Forum on Transparency and Exchange of Information for Tax Purposes. Furthermore, research by the OECD and others point to the importance of low corporation tax rates to encourage economic growth.

Questions Nos. 121 to 123, inclusive, answered with Question No. 118.

Banking Sector Regulation

124. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he has examined a report (details supplied) on a group in the UK; his views on the report; his views on whether the report applies to all parts of the group including the group's Irish subsidiaries; his further views on whether the practices of the group here were dictated by or consistent with the practices undertaken in the UK; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17254/18]

125. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if the Central Bank accepts a company's (details supplied) report in the UK on a group; if the Central Bank further accepts that the report applies to all the group including its branch here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17255/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 124 and 125 together.

As the deputy is aware the Central Bank of Ireland is responsible for the regulation of the financial services sector. The Central Bank has confirmed that it continues to have ongoing engagement with the UK Financial Conduct Authority in relation to Ulster Bank Global Restructuring Group (GRG). However it is not in a position to comment on the specifics of such engagement. While the Central Bank cannot comment on individual interactions with regulated entities, the Central Bank has and continues to engage with Ulster Bank Ireland DAC (UBI) in relation to this matter.

In November 2016, Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) announced a complaints process and refund of complex fees for SME customers in GRG and indicated publicly that "A customer is in-scope for the new complaints process if they were a small or medium sized enterprise under the control of GRG in the United Kingdom or Republic of Ireland between 1 January 2008 and

31 December 2013”.

In line with its risk-based supervisory approach, the Central Bank has been and continues to monitor all relevant issues as they arise from a system perspective. The Central Bank will continue to monitor this matter and will be overseeing complaints received by UBI for any issues arising particularly in the context of SME Code compliance.

The protection of SME customers is a priority for the Central Bank. The Central Bank published SME Lending Regulations in 2015, which replaced the SME Code (originally introduced in 2009 and updated in 2012). The SME Lending Regulations are designed to facilitate access to credit, promote fairness and transparency in the manner in which regulated entities deal with SME borrowers and provide a framework within which they deal with financial difficulty cases. They provide key protections to SME customers including requirements relating to applications for credit, provision of information, dealing with SMEs in arrears and financial difficulties, appeals and handling complaints.

If a consumer is concerned or unhappy with how they have been dealt with by a firm regulated by the Central Bank, there are clear processes in place in the Regulations for handling complaints. The Central Bank encourages consumers who are dissatisfied with their experience of financial products or services to ensure that they communicate their complaint directly to their financial services provider. This ensures that their complaint receives the protections provided by the Regulations.

Banking Sector Remuneration

126. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to inform the Houses of the Oireachtas of the way in which he will vote on the proposed deferred share bonus scheme in a bank (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17260/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy is aware AIB’s annual general meeting is due to take place next Wednesday, 25th April. The bank has put forward a non-binding resolution which puts a formal executive share scheme before shareholders for their consideration. I announced today that it is my intention to carry out a review of banking remuneration policy but as I am not announcing any change in policy at this juncture I therefore intend to vote against this resolution.

Question No. 127 answered with Question No. 118.

Tax Reliefs Data

128. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of applications for tax relief certificates under the employment and investment incentive scheme, EIIS, in each year since its creation and in each month of 2018; the number of applications awaiting processing and approval by the Revenue Commissioners; the average time taken between original application and the final approval for tax relief certificates under the EIIS in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17299/18]

129. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of outstanding applications for tax relief certificates under the EIIS awaiting processing and approval by the Revenue Commissioners at the end of each month in each of the years 2016 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17300/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 128 and 129 together.

Employment and Investment Incentive (EII) relief is granted in two tranches: the first portion of the relief (currently 30/40 and previously 30/41) is given at the time of investment (on foot of a completed Form EII 1), while the second portion (currently 10/40 and previously 11/41) is given if, after 3 years, the company has increased employment or spent all of the money on qualifying research and development (Form EII 1A).

Revenue advise that the increased complexity of the scheme, arising from changes in Finance Act 2015 and 2017, means that each application takes longer to process than in previous years. The increased complexity also results in a large number of incomplete applications being made, which in turn increases the volume of correspondence dealt with by the processing team.

The figures in relation to the number of initial applications for the incentive are set out in tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: No. of initial applications for EII Certification 2012 – 2017

YEAR	QUALIFYING COMPANIES	NO. OF INVESTORS
2012	78	352
2013	190	1,028
2014	239	1,395
2015	279	1,530
2016	261	1,768
2017 *	273	1,455

* Please note that the 2017 figures are provisional and subject to change. The analysis of those 2017 applications still waiting to be processed is not yet complete.

Table 2: No. of Applications for EII Certification 2018

MONTH	QUALIFYING COMPANIES
January	11
February	13
March	12

* The number of 2018 investors is not currently available as the analysis of these applications is not yet complete.

The number of initial applications for certificates under the EII currently awaiting processing is 133 (i.e. initial applications where no processing has yet taken place). As such, this figure excludes cases where taxpayers have been asked to provide additional information but have not yet done so.

I am advised that it is not possible to give an average time taken to issue a decision regarding approval or rejection. Where a full application, with all supporting documentation, is received a decision will issue more quickly than a case where additional information and clarifications must be sought. Equally, it takes less time to carry out the level of examination required in respect of a claim by a company with a simple corporate structure than a claim in respect of a complex corporate grouping. At present, in respect of the more complex cases, it can take up to six months for a reply to issue.

The figures requested by the Deputy in relation to the number of outstanding applications by month since January 2016, are set out in tables 3, 4 and 5. These figures include both EII 1 and EII 1A certifications.

I am further advised by Revenue that figures prior to August 2017 represent unworked items only (i.e. where no processing has yet taken place), while those after August 2017 include items in respect of which a final answer has not yet issued. Therefore, a file was not identified as outstanding in July 2017 where correspondence was sent to a taxpayer requesting more information and that information was still awaited at the end of the month. That file, from August 2017, is identified as an outstanding work item. These changes in the recording of the statistics, which allowed for a more accurate representation of the level of the work outstanding, account for the large spike in the numbers in the latter part of 2017. While it is not possible to split the August 2017 to December 2017 figures into cases worked and cases closed, this information has been collated for the first three months of 2018.

Table 3: 2016 Total Applications O/S By Month

MONTH	NUMBER O/S
January	29
February	50
March	43
April	29
May	18
June	26
July	18
August	28
September	38
October	65
November	34
December	35

Table 4: 2017 Total Applications O/S By Month

MONTH	NUMBER O/S
January	59
February	52
March	84
April	98
May	76
June	49
July	88
August	164
September	186
October	277
November	189
December	187

Table 5: 2018 Total Applications O/S By Month

MONTH	Opening	Received	Closed	NUMBER O/S	Of which additional information was requested in the month
January	187	11	9	189	57
February	189	13	14	188	60
March	188	12	20	180	62

It should be noted that the figure above of 180 cases outstanding as of March 2018 relates to both initial applications as well as follow-on case work.

Finally, and as the Deputy will be aware, I announced that a review of EII will be carried out this year. I expect that the review will be completed ahead of Budget 2019. The review will, among other matters, consider operational aspects of the scheme.

NAMA Property Construction

130. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of NAMA built residential properties in each of the years 2015 to 2017, inclusive, and to date in 2018; the number of these properties that are considered social and affordable; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17301/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): At the outset, it is important to note that NAMA does not build residential property. Instead, where commercially viable, it funds residential delivery on sites controlled by its debtors and receivers.

In late 2013, NAMA indicated that it aimed to fund the delivery of 4,500 homes on lands controlled by NAMA debtors and receivers over the period to end-2016. By end-2016 this target had been exceeded with NAMA funding the delivery of 4,700 homes.

Subsequently, NAMA stated in late 2015 that it would aim to fund and facilitate the delivery of up to 20,000 homes by end-2020, assuming that projects were commercially viable. In total, since 2014, NAMA has directly funded the delivery of 7,190 homes. The breakdown by year sought by the Deputy is set out in the following table:

NAMA-funded residential units

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018-(To end-January)
NAMA-Funded Residential Units	1,502	1,029	2,117	2,503	39

In addition, I am advised that over 2,700 units are currently under construction and planning permission has been secured for another 8,150 units. In addition, I am advised that some 2,000 units have been completed on sites sold by NAMA debtors and receivers.

In relation to social and affordable housing, which I am taking to refer to housing made available at below market prices, it is important to note that assets often referred to as “NAMA land” or “NAMA properties” are not owned by NAMA. NAMA owns loans. Such property

is owned by private persons who owe money to NAMA (“NAMA debtors”) and serves as collateral for those amounts owed. It is the income and proceeds generated from this property, via rental or sales, that is used by NAMA debtors to repay what they owe to NAMA. All borrowers have the right to maximise the value of the property which secures his/her loan. NAMA cannot force a borrower to take action which would reduce his/her repayment capacity, such as providing property for affordable housing where that is not economically optimal. To do so would breach the borrower’s property rights protected under Article 43 of the Constitution.

That said, I am advised that sites controlled by NAMA debtors and receivers are subject to the same Part V planning conditions as other residential developments. Under Part V, 10% of the properties must be provided to local authorities for social and affordable housing. Based on this statutory requirement, it is estimated that up to 720 units were deliverable under Part V arrangements since 2014, including 568 units since 2015. For certain developments, the Part V requirements may have been fulfilled through alternative arrangements at the request of the local authorities concerned.

I would also draw the Deputy’s attention to the fact that since 2014, NAMA has delivered 2,472 houses and apartments for use as social housing as part of its Social Housing programme, excluding houses which were provided under Part V arrangements. NAMA identified vacant units within its debtors’ stock and offered them to local authorities and approved housing bodies. Where demand was confirmed by local authorities, through the Housing Agency, funding was provided to purchase these properties, and where necessary, complete them in full compliance with all statutory requirements prior to delivery to the housing bodies. To date, NAMA has invested approximately €350 million in remediating, completing and purchasing properties for social housing use. NAMA’s special vehicle, NARPS, purchases suitable units for onward leasing to local authorities and approved housing bodies.

Tax Rebates

131. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance if a refund of income tax is due and will be arranged in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17383/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that it cannot determine if a refund of tax is correctly due in situations where statutory tax returns remain outstanding.

The person in question has not filed their Income Tax returns for the years 2015 and 2016. Once the returns are filed, Revenue will be in a position to quantify the person’s overall tax position and determine if any refund is due.

The Deputy will be aware that a claim for a refund of tax must be made no later than four years after the end of the tax year to which the claim relates.

Student Grants Data

132. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of students in receipt of SUSI funding in each year since 2014, in tabular form. [17226/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The number of grant recipients for the academic years 2013/14 to 2017/18 is set out in the table. The data encompass

students in receipt of a SUSI grant and grants from the other 66 awarding authorities who have continued to process renewal applications on a transitional basis, pending the full transfer of all grants to SUSI.

Grantholders - Academic Year	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	Provisional 2017/18
Total Grant-holders	78,965	80,551	80622	78,904	78,337

Skills Shortages

133. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the actions he is taking to combat the shortage of labour in the construction industry as outlined in a report (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17248/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): The report referred to by the Deputy states that a major issue for the economy in general and in particular the construction sector in the coming years will be the shortage of labour. Securing skills supply from the education and training to the construction sector is a major focus of my Department as part of broader Government actions to increase housing supply and roll out the National Development Plan and the National Planning Framework.

There are a range of new and expanding programmes in place to meet skills demands in the construction sector. These include programmes identified following engagement between education and training providers and construction employers through the 9 Regional Skills Fora.

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

Apprenticeship is a demand driven educational and training programme, which aims to develop the skills of an apprentice in order to meet the needs of industry and the labour market. Consequently, the number of construction related apprentices being registered is determined by employers within the construction sector. My Department and SOLAS are committed to supporting the registration of apprentices in the construction sector. Registrations on craft apprenticeships are forecast to increase further up to 2020.

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

In addition to apprenticeship provision, almost 7,000 beneficiaries participated in SOLAS-funded construction related further education and training (FET) programmes provided by Education and Training Boards (ETBs) under the 'Built Environment' skills cluster during 2017. Examples of these programmes include programmes in concreting, ground work, scaffolding

and sustainable construction.

Separately, following a series of discussions with the CIF, SOLAS identified the following semi-skilled occupations as priority areas for the ETBs;

- Form worker
- Steel-fixer
- Curtain waller (installing glass and plaque tiles on the outside of building replacing brick-work)

Programmes have been put in place to produce approximately 100 form workers, 100 steel-fixers and 50 curtain wallers per year. SOLAS will continue to engage with the ETBs to expand provision to meet needs in these areas.

There were almost 1,700 higher education awards (levels 6-10 on the National Framework of Qualifications) in construction related courses in 2016. Between 2012 and 2016 the number of graduates declined by approximately 1,180 (or 42%). The most significant declines were at levels 7 and 8, which combined saw 1,280 fewer graduates over the period 2012-2016. However, there are signs of a recovery between 2015 and 2016, with the number of level 6 awards increasing slightly (70 additional awards year-on-year), a halt in the decline of level 7 awards, and a slowing in the rate of decline at level 8 (70 fewer awards year-on-year, compared to previous years' declines of at least 200 or more). The decline in level 8 awards is likely to be reversed in the short to medium term: the number of CAO acceptances has been increasing since 2014 (reaching in excess of 1,000 in 2016, approximately double the level observed in 2012). In addition, the calls for Springboard programmes in 2016 and 2017 combined approved almost 300 places on courses related to the construction sector.

Student Accommodation

134. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on a matter (details supplied); and the action he will take to ensure students and their families are not priced out of accommodation. [17124/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am aware of the price increases for purpose built student accommodation in certain private developments. The Inter-departmental Working Group on Student Accommodation has been asked to assess the impact of licence arrangements on residents of purpose built student accommodation.

Together with the Minister of State for Higher Education and the Minister of State for Housing and Urban Development I launched the National Student Accommodation Strategy in July 2017. Addressing the supply of purpose built student accommodation is an important element of Rebuilding Ireland, the Government's housing strategy. To date, 2,687 additional bed spaces have been provided since the launch of Rebuilding Ireland. As of end March, 2018, there were an additional 5,842 bed spaces actively being built, with over 2,570 of these due to come on stream for the 2018/2019 academic year and almost 3,270 the following year.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

135. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way in which a child (details supplied) diagnosed with autism and currently attending an

interactive early intervention class in Skibbereen could be moved to a junior ASD class in Dunmanway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17147/18]

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

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.

My Department therefore provides for a continuum of provision which includes mainstream school placements with additional supports, or for pupils who require more specialist interventions, special school and special class placements.

This network includes 130 ASD early intervention classes, 635 primary ASD classes and 277 post-primary ASD classes in mainstream schools and 125 Special School of which 20 are ASD special schools.

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.

My Department's policy is that all children must be enrolled in the primary school system, whether through placement in mainstream classes, in special classes or in special schools in the September prior to their sixth birthday. If children are not in school by six years of age, under the Education Welfare Act 2000, the Educational Welfare service must be satisfied that the child is receiving a minimum standard of education in a place other than a recognised school.

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).

As the matter raised by the Deputy refers to a particular child, I have arranged for the Deputy's question to be forwarded to the National Council for Special Education for their attention and direct reply.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

136. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to fund a purpose built ASD unit at a school (details supplied); and when funding will be made available. [17170/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Funding has been approved to provide a two-classroom ASD unit at the school to which the Deputy refers. The project has been devolved for delivery to the school authority. The project is in the design stages. My Department's Professional and Technical staff visited the school recently and are assisting the school with design options.

Funding is committed to the project. The first tranche of devolved project funding (70%) is drawn down by a school authority when a project goes on site. The final tranche (30%) is drawn down when a project is satisfactorily completed.

School Accommodation Provision

137. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application by a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17171/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm to the Deputy that the school in question submitted an application for additional accommodation. The application will be considered and a decision will be conveyed to the school authority as soon as the assessment process has been completed.

School Accommodation Provision

138. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a decision on an application by a school (details supplied) will be made; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that if a decision is not forthcoming the school will have no other option but to begin implementing student caps from 2019 onwards; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that a phased development plan for this application would be possible; if an official in his Department will make contact with the school to discuss the matter further; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17173/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to confirm to the Deputy that an application seeking significant levels of additional accommodation has been received from the school referred to.

The application is currently being considered and a decision will be advised to the school authorities shortly.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

139. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to facilitate an additional specialised educational unit as a part of a campus (details supplied); if the existing units will be extended to accommodate additional pupil needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17177/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible for organising and planning provision for children with Special Educational Needs, including the establishment of special classes in mainstream primary and post primary schools.

Special classes offer a supportive learning environment to students with ASD who are unable to access the curriculum in a mainstream class, even with support, for most or all of their school day. Special classes are for students who have a recommendation for a special class placement in their professional reports.

Should the NCSE identify the requirement for additional special class placements in the area it will contact schools in the area in relation to establishing an ASD special class. Schools

may also apply to the NCSE to open a special class where a need has been identified in their area i.e. a number of students have professional reports indicating they require the support of a special class.

The NCSE, in looking to open special classes, must take into account the present and future potential need for such classes, taking particular account of the educational needs of the children concerned. The NCSE will also take account of location and sustainability in looking to establish special classes in certain areas.

In addition, the NCSE will consider:

- the school's accommodation and accessibility
- the number of special classes, if any, already in the school.

With regard to Co. Kildare in particular, there are 4 special schools and 66 special classes attached to mainstream schools. Of these, 6 are ASD early intervention classes, 41 are primary ASD classes and 12 are post primary ASD classes. The number of ASD special classes in Co. Kildare have increased from 17 in 2011/2012 to 65 in 2017/2018.

The NCSE has informed my Department that they intend to establish a number of new ASD Special Classes in Co. Kildare for 2018/19 school year to meet currently identified need.

In the case of all new schools, it is general practice to include a Special Needs Unit (SNU) in the accommodation brief for new school buildings, unless local circumstances indicate that it will not be required. A two classroom Special Needs Unit is being provided in each of the two post-primary schools currently under construction in the area referred to by the Deputy. Both of these schools are due to be completed by May 2019.

Parents/Guardians who may need advice or are experiencing difficulties in locating a school placement, including special class placement, should contact their local Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) who can assist in identifying an appropriate educational placement for their child. Contact details are available at <http://ncse.ie/seno-contact-list>.

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

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

140. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to provide an autism unit (details supplied) for the Maynooth area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17179/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible for organising and planning provision for children with Special Educational Needs, including the establishment of special classes in mainstream primary and post primary schools.

Special classes offer a supportive learning environment to students with ASD who are unable to access the curriculum in a mainstream class, even with support, for most or all of their school day. Special classes are for students who have a recommendation for a special class placement in their professional reports.

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Should the NCSE identify the requirement for additional special class placements in the area it will contact schools in the area in relation to establishing an ASD special class. Schools may also apply to the NCSE to open a special class where a need has been identified in their area i.e. a number of students have professional reports indicating they require the support of a special class.

The NCSE, in looking to open special classes, must take into account the present and future potential need for such classes, taking particular account of the educational needs of the children concerned. The NCSE will also take account of location and sustainability in looking to establish special classes in certain areas.

In addition, the NCSE will consider:

- the school's accommodation and accessibility
- the number of special classes, if any, already in the school.

With regard to Co. Kildare in particular, there are 4 special schools and 66 special classes attached to mainstream schools. Of these, 6 are ASD early intervention classes, 41 are primary ASD classes and 12 are post primary ASD classes. The number of ASD special classes in Co. Kildare have increased from 17 in 2011/2012 to 65 in 2017/2018.

The NCSE has informed my Department that they intend to establish a number of new ASD Special Classes in Co. Kildare for 2018/19 school year to meet currently identified need.

In the case of all new schools, it is general practice to include a Special Needs Unit (SNU) in the accommodation brief for new school buildings, unless local circumstances indicate that it will not be required. A two classroom Special Needs Unit is being provided in each of the two post-primary schools currently under construction in the area referred to by the Deputy. Both of these schools are due to be completed by May 2019.

Parents/Guardians who may need advice or are experiencing difficulties in locating a school placement, including special class placement, should contact their local Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) who can assist in identifying an appropriate educational placement for their child. Contact details are available at <http://ncse.ie/seno-contact-list>.

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

Tionscadail Tógála Scoileanna

141. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna cén uair a cheadófar airgead chun síneadh a chur le scoil (sonraí tugtha) agus chun athchóiriú a dhéanamh uirthi freisin; an mbeidh mórán moille leis an gceadú ó tharla go bhfuil an t-eolas a bhí ar iarraidh curtha isteach anois; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [17183/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Faoi mar is eol don Teachta, cheadaigh mo Roinn deontas cineachta nach beag leis an scoil i gceist i mí Mheán Fómhair na bliana 2014, chun síneadh buan agus oibreacha athchumraithe a dhéanamh lena n-éascófaí go mbainfeadh gach cóiríocht réamhdhéanta de shuíomh na scoile.

Is eol duit freisin go raibh mo Roinn ag feitheamh ar a thuilleadh eolais i ndáil le plean costais leasaithe, rud a fuarthas cúpla lá ó shin (13 Aibreán). Táthar ag iniúchadh an plean

costais leasaithe faoi láthair, agus beidh mo Roinn i dteagmháil leis an scoil faoin ábhar go luath.

Schools Site Acquisitions

142. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if sites have been identified and secured and permission granted for proposed new primary schools in areas (details supplied) in tabular form. [17186/18]

143. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if sites have been identified and secured and permission granted for proposed new post primary schools in areas (details supplied). [17193/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 142 and 143 together.

As the Deputy is aware, I recently announced the opening of 42 new schools over the next 4 years. This announcement followed nationwide demographic exercises carried out by my Department into the current and future need for primary and post-primary school places across the country.

Following on from the announcement, the locations for all of the schools will be determined as part of the site acquisition process.

In line with the policy on the use of state assets (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform Circulars 11/15 and 17/16), my Department will be seeking to maximize the use of sites already in my ownership and of available properties in the ownership of other State bodies, where these are considered suitable.

In addition as part of my Department's ongoing engagement with Local Authorities in respect of statutory planning processes and under the MoU on school site acquisitions, my Department will be examining all potential suitable site options, including appropriately zoned sites, to serve the relevant areas.

Taking into account all of the above, decisions will then be made as part of the site acquisition process in relation to appropriate sites for all the schools announced and will be confirmed at a later date.

Schools Building Projects Applications

144. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application by a school (details supplied) for a new building; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17194/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, a building project for the school to which he refers is included in my Department's 6 Year Construction Programme.

In the context of progressing the project, a school site visit by my Department's technical staff has been undertaken. My Department is considering the outcome from that visit and will be in further contact with the school authorities on the matter in due course.

Teacher Redeployment

145. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of teachers transferred to alternative schools on health grounds in each of the years 2007 to 2017, in tabular form. [17196/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Redeployment schemes exist to facilitate the transfer of teachers in cases where a surplus exists in a school or Education and Training Board (ETB) and in cases of school closure.

In the ETB sector, each ETB may transfer teachers between schools within that ETB. My Department does not hold statistics on such transfers, regardless of the reason for which they occur.

Teacher Discipline

146. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of instances in which the procedures set out in circulars (details supplied) prior to their being superseded by Circular 0071/2014, have been ceased by an employer and replaced by an informal route in each of the years 2007 to 2017, in tabular form; and the details of the informal route taken. [17197/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The procedures set out in Circular 0071/2014 (and Circular 0059/2009 prior to its being superseded by 0071/2014) may be commenced or ceased at different stages by the employer depending on the circumstances of the individual case concerned. My Department does not hold statistics on such cases.

Teagmháil na nÓg

147. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna ar iarr Bord Oideachais agus Oiliúna na Gaillimhe agus Ros Comáin cead air deireadh a chur leis an aon ionad amháin de Theagmháil na nÓg (Youthreach) atá suite i dTír an Fhia i nGaeltacht na Gaillimhe agus ina gcuirtear cúrsaí ar fáil trí Ghaeilge; má d'iarr, ar tugadh an cead sin; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [17204/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): Rinne oifigigh ó mo Roinn fiosrú le Bord Oideachais agus Oiliúna na Gaillimhe agus Ros Comáin (GRETb). Tá sé tugtha le fios acusan go bhfuil fás tagtha ar líon na scoláirí ón gceantar atá ag fanacht sa soláthar oideachais ag an dara leibhéal agus an Ardeistiméireacht á déanamh acu. Cuirtear fáilte roimh an bhfás sin agus dá bharr sin tá laghdú suntasach tagtha ar an éileamh atá ar sholáthar Theagmháil na nÓg. Fanfaidh ionad Theagmháil na nÓg i Leitir Móir oscailte don bhliain acadúil seo chugainn ionas gur féidir leis na scoláirí a gcuid staidéir a chríochnú agus teastas a bhaint amach. Tá sé curtha in iúl ag GRETb do mo Roinnse go bhfuil siad ag dul i gcomhairle le grúpaí agus eagraíochtaí pobail áitiúla chomh maith le SOLAS, an tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna, lena chinntiú go leanfar de bheith ag freastal ar na riachtanais oideachais agus oiliúna go léir atá ag an bpobal áitiúil agus ag na ceantair máguaird agus go ndéanfar soláthar do na riachtanais sin.

Schools Building Projects Status

148. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide further information on his announcement on 13 April 2018 of a new 16 classroom primary school for Carrigaline by 2020; if this is in addition to primary schools in the area; if there is a site proposed for the new school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17222/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, I recently announced the opening of 42 new schools over the next 4 years. This announcement followed nationwide demographic exercises carried out by my Department into the current and future need for primary and post-primary school places across the country.

The announcement included provision for a new 16 classroom primary school to serve Carrigaline to open in September 2020. This is in addition to existing primary school provision in the area.

Following on from the announcement, the locations for all of the schools, including the new primary school announced to serve Carrigaline, will be determined as part of the site process. Decisions will then be made in relation to appropriate sites for all the schools announced and will be confirmed at a later date.

School Funding

149. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a school (details supplied) will continue to be funded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17223/18]

150. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the correspondence he has had with a school (details supplied) in relation to funding for the school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17224/18]

155. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the decision to withdraw funding from a school (details supplied) which will effectively close the school entirely in June 2018 will be postponed; if the school will be phased out over a two year period to allow the older students from the Traveller community complete the leaving certificate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17250/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 149, 150 and 155 together.

Education provision on an inclusive basis is a fundamental principle of our education and training system. Ensuring every child is supported and given the opportunity to reach their full potential is a key priority for this Government and My Department is committed to improving educational outcomes for members of the Traveller and Roma communities.

The details supplied by the Deputies' relate to a school with Special School designation dating from a period when separate education provision for members of the Traveller community was the norm. The phasing out of segregated education provision for Traveller children began in 2006 in accordance with Government policy which was developed in consultation with Traveller representative groups. St. Thomas's is currently the only remaining education centre where provision for Traveller students is made on a segregated basis.

My Department has been engaging with the Patron of St. Thomas's for many years to progress the transfer of its student cohort to the mainstream school system in line with this agreed national policy. It is important to note that, as with all schools under private patronage, the decision in relation to school closure, amalgamation etc. ultimately rests with the Patron.

In order to ensure a smooth and effective transition of provision for students, my officials are engaging with the school Patron and the Educational Welfare Service of Tusla in relation to future education provision for the current student cohort in St. Thomas's. Tusla's Educational Welfare Service is available to work with parents to source school places for the current pupil cohort.

School Closures

151. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the events surrounding the closure of a school (details supplied); if there is provision for payment of outstanding moneys owed to teachers; his plans to regulate these establishments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17240/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Provider in question came to my Department's attention earlier this year following an inspection by the Department of Justice and Equality related to the listing of its programmes on the Interim List of Eligible Programmes (ILEP). A listing on the ILEP is required for a provider to enrol students requiring immigration permissions.

On 9th February 2018, following the outturn of this inspection and an assessment of the provider's non-compliance with the criteria for inclusion on the ILEP, the Department of Justice and Equality in consultation with my Department took the decision to remove this provider's programmes from the ILEP in line with the established procedures for this process.

The Provider in question has comprehensive learner protection arrangements in place by way of an insurance policy. Arrangements for students affected by the closure are being made under this policy, enabling students to complete their courses with other providers or to be otherwise compensated. The Department of Justice and Equality has engaged with students holding immigration permissions to facilitate the teaching out the programmes concerned.

The ILEP is an interim regulatory tool for student immigration until the introduction of the International Education Mark (IEM). Legislative measures to enable the introduction of the IEM are contained within the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Amendment) Bill. The General Scheme of this Bill was published on 15th May 2017 following its approval by Government and drafting work on this Bill by the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel is ongoing. The enactment of this legislation will enable the introduction of the IEM and its operation by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI).

National Educational Psychological Service

152. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he is satisfied that a purpose built school (details supplied) for pupils with a moderate, severe or profound general learning disability, including pupils with autism within these categories, has sufficient access to the NEPS services, including in-services training and school support; the steps he will take to rectify this inequality and ensure that the 15 teachers and 32 SNAs have access and equality to in-service training and school support; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17241/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can inform the Deputy that my Department's National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) has not extended service to special schools, including that to which the Deputy refers in his question, who tradi-

tionally received multi-disciplinary services, including psychology from HSE services or bodies funded by the HSE.

I can also inform the Deputy that the school in question has been afforded access to the Scheme for the Commissioning of Psychological Assessment, a panel of Private practitioners maintain and paid for by NEPS providing assessment services to schools. The school has accessed this provision to some small extent over the past number of years.

In-service training for teachers in special schools is provided by the Special Education Support Service (S.E.S.S.) now part of the N.C.S. E. Support Service.

Schools Building Projects Applications

153. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an additional school accommodation application by a school (details supplied); if the project will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17242/18]

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

The application is currently under consideration and a decision will be conveyed to the school as soon as this process has been completed.

Schools Building Projects

154. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an Educate Together school will be built in Whitehall, Dublin 9 (details supplied); if so, the timeframe for the building of the school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17244/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy will be aware, on the 30th January, 2017, I announced new plans aimed at providing more multi-denominational and non-denominational schools across the country, in line with the choices of parents, families and school communities and the Programme for Government commitment in this area.

The Schools Reconfiguration for Diversity process will support transfers of schools to multi-denominational patrons in response to the wishes of local families is based around principles of transparency and cooperation.

I would point out that the previous model of divestment yielded only a very limited number of schools for transfer to multi-denominational patrons (10 since 2013). The divestment model does not involve building new schools and requires the availability of school premises vacated, for example, due to amalgamation or closure.

I believe that the new schools reconfiguration for diversity process, which will involve the transfer of live schools, has the potential to significantly increase patron diversity in our school system with a target of reaching 400 multi-denominational and non-denominational schools by 2030. While these new arrangements are being introduced, my Department will continue to work with the main stakeholders to progress delivery of diversity in the areas already identified, of which Whitehall is one.

School Patronage

156. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the patronage of the 26 new primary and 12 new secondary schools announced recently; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17259/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy will be aware, I announced plans for the establishment of 42 new schools over the next four years (2019 to 2022). This announcement follows nationwide, demographic exercises carried out by my Department into the future need for primary and post-primary schools across the country and the 4-year horizon will enable increased lead-in times for planning and delivery of the necessary infrastructure.

With regard to demand for particular models of school provision, it should be noted that the patronage process for new schools is a separate process. This process is run after it has been decided that a new school is required. Parental preferences are central to this process. The process is fair, transparent and open to all patrons, patron bodies and prospective patrons to apply for patronage of any planned new school under this process.

The patronage process for new schools is overseen by an external independent advisory group, the New Schools Establishment Group (NSEG). Following their consideration of my Department's assessment reports, the NSEG submits a report with recommendations to me for consideration and final decision. The assessment reports and the NSEG recommendations for all such patronage processes are made available on my Department's website.

Apprenticeship Programmes

157. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to expand to a new shared apprenticeship scheme for the construction sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17308/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): Registrations on craft apprenticeships have grown strongly in recent years following a very significant collapse in the number of apprenticeship registrations between 2008-2011. SOLAS, in partnership with Construction Industry Federation (CIF) and Waterford Wexford Education and Training Board (WWETB), operated a pilot initiative in the last year to test the viability of a shared apprenticeship scheme. Following analysis of the pilot outcomes and in consultation with both the CIF and WWETB, I understand that SOLAS decided not to operationalise the pilot initiative more widely. In particular, it was found that the pilot did not attract employers in sufficient numbers to suggest that the scheme had the potential to have a significant impact on apprenticeship recruitment. I have been informed by SOLAS that they are currently in discussions with representatives from industry to assess how the scheme could be made more viable.

Adult Education Provision

158. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the participation rate in lifelong learning in each of the years 2014 to 2017 and to date in 2018, based on the latest data available; the EU average rate in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the

matter. [17313/18]

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

The lifelong learning target set by the EU as part of ET2020 is based on the number of 25-64 year-olds who had engaged in formal or non-formal learning activities in the previous four weeks. The rates for Ireland and the EU 28 average are outlined in the table below. The latest available data is for 2017 and is provisional (p) only.

Lifelong Learning rate for adults (25-64 years), 2014-2017 (annual averages)

-	2014	2015	2016	2017
European Union (28)	10.8	10.7	10.8	10.9 (p)
Ireland	6.9	6.5	6.4	6.1 (p)

Skills Development

159. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the percentage of persons in the labour force that have basic or above basic digital skills; the corresponding EU average rate based on the latest data available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17314/18]

160. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the percentage of persons in employment that have basic or above basic digital skills; the corresponding EU average rate based on the latest data available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17315/18]

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

I propose to take Questions Nos. 159 and 160 together.

Table 1. Persons (%) in the labour force (employed and unemployed) with basic or above basic digital skills in Ireland and the EU:

-	2016	2017
European Union (28)	63	65
Ireland	50	55

Source: Eurostat

Table 2. Persons (%) in employment* with basic or above basic digital skills in Ireland and the EU:

-	2016	2017
European Union (28)	65	66
Ireland	54	58

Source: Eurostat

*In employment refers to those aged 25-64 who are employees, self-employed or family workers.

This material from Eurostat is based on the CSO ICT survey, which asks households and individuals questions on their access to ICT, e-skills and other related issues.

Schools Building Projects Status

161. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a school (details supplied) will be established; the schedule for the delivery of the building programme; when the site location will be confirmed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17326/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, I recently announced the opening of 42 new schools over the next 4 years. This announcement followed nationwide demographic exercises carried out by my Department into the current and future need for primary and post-primary school places across the country, and included provision for a new post primary school to serve Citywest/Saggart (Tallaght & Newcastle/Rathcoole school planning areas) as a Regional Solution to open in September 2020.

Following on from the announcement, the locations for all of the schools will be determined as part of the site acquisition process.

In line with the policy on the use of state assets (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform Circulars 11/15 and 17/16), my Department will be seeking to maximize the use of sites already in my ownership and of available properties in the ownership of other State bodies, where these are considered suitable.

In addition as part of my Department's ongoing engagement with Local Authorities in respect of statutory planning processes and under the MoU on school site acquisitions, my Department will be examining all potential suitable site options, including appropriately zoned sites, to serve the relevant areas.

Taking into account all of the above, decisions will then be made as part of the site acquisition process in relation to appropriate sites for all the schools announced including the new post-primary announced to serve Citywest/Saggart, and will be confirmed at a later date.

School Accommodation Provision

162. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a school (details supplied) in County Mayo has had its application for additional accommodation declined; if he is satisfied with the reasons provided for the refusal; the way in which the conclusion was reached regarding future enrolment trends; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17333/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that the school referred to applied to my Department in February seeking additional accommodation in respect of the appointment of an additional mainstream teacher.

Based on the projected enrolments in the area concerned and the anticipated future enrolment trends, it is envisaged that enrolments in the school planning area have peaked and are expected to decline in the short term. In that context, my Department considers that the additional post may not be retained.

My Department is satisfied that the schools currently serving the school planning area in question can, between them, cater for the demand for school places.

In light of the above my Department is not in a position at this time to provide funding to the school in question for additional permanent accommodation.

Schools Building Projects Status

163. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans in respect of the recently announced new primary school for Dunshaughlin, County Meath; if a preferred site has been selected; and when the tendering process is likely to commence. [17344/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, I recently announced the opening of 42 new schools over the next 4 years. This announcement followed nationwide demographic exercises carried out by my Department into the current and future need for primary and post-primary school places across the country.

Following on from the announcement, the locations for all of the schools, including the new primary school to serve Dunshaughlin, will be determined during the site acquisition process. As part of my Department's ongoing engagement with Local Authorities in respect of statutory planning processes and under the MoU on school site acquisitions, my Department will be examining potential suitable site options, including appropriately zoned sites, to serve the relevant areas. Decisions will then be made as part of the site acquisition process in relation to appropriate sites for all the schools announced and will be confirmed at a later date.

School Patronage

164. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way in which he plans to proceed with the patronage of the recently announced new primary school for Dunshaughlin, County Meath; and if a local survey of prospective parents will be undertaken by his Department. [17345/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, I announced plans for the establishment of 42 new schools over the next four years (2019 to 2022). This announcement follows nationwide demographic exercises carried out by my Department into the future need for primary and post-primary schools across the country and the 4-year horizon will enable increased lead-in times for planning and delivery of the necessary infrastructure.

A patronage process is run after it has been decided, based on demographic analysis, that a new school is required. This patronage process is open to all patron bodies and prospective patrons. Parental preferences for each patron, from parents of children who reside in the school planning areas concerned, together with the extent of diversity currently available in these areas, are key to decisions in relation to the outcome of this process. It is expected that patronage processes for primary schools due to open in September 2019 will be run in the latter part of 2018.

The patronage process for new schools is overseen by an external independent advisory group, the New Schools Establishment Group (NSEG). Following their consideration of my Department's assessment reports, the NSEG submits a report with recommendations to me for consideration and final decision. The assessment reports and the NSEG recommendations for all such patronage processes are available on my Department's website. An announcement will be made at a later stage as to when the patronage process will commence for the new primary school in Dunshaughlin, Co Meath.

An Online Patronage Process System (OPPS) is currently being developed by my Department to provide objective information to all parents which will allow them to make an informed choice about their preferred model of patronage for their child's education. Parental prefer-

ences are currently collected based on direct engagement with patron bodies.

Schools Site Acquisitions

165. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the location the new regional secondary school between Drogheda and Laytown school catchment areas is to be located in the context of the recent new school announcements. [17346/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, I recently announced the opening of 42 new schools over the next 4 years. This announcement followed nationwide demographic exercises carried out by my Department into the current and future need for primary and post-primary school places across the country.

Following on from the announcement, the locations for all of the schools, including the new post-primary announced to serve Laytown and Drogheda, will be determined during the site acquisition process. As part of my Department's ongoing engagement with Local Authorities in respect of statutory planning processes and under the MoU on school site acquisitions, my Department will be examining potential suitable site options, including appropriately zoned sites, to serve the relevant areas. Decisions will then be made as part of the site acquisition process in relation to appropriate sites for all the schools announced and will be confirmed at a later date.

Parental Leave

166. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to expand the parental leave process to further strengthen support for parents; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17214/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): As the Deputy will be aware, the Programme for Partnership Government includes a commitment to increase paid parental leave during the first year of a child's life, as research shows that parental care is of particular importance in the first year of life.

To further this commitment, the Government has established an interdepartmental working group to develop proposals to give effect to the programme commitments. The key objectives of this group are to:

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

The interdepartmental group is currently working on a policy approach and I expect it to report with its proposals towards the end of this month. In this light, the Deputy will appreciate that it would be premature to give any details in relation to the expansion of parental leave.

Naturalisation Applications

167. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of an application by persons (details supplied) for naturalisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17130/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that processing of the applications for a certificate of naturalisation on behalf of the persons referred to by the Deputy is ongoing and will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible.

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

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

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

Garda Operations

168. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will report on An Garda Síochána's Operation Chain; the number of persons arrested and charged to date; the number of successful convictions obtained to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17138/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of resources and the conduct of Operations.

I have asked the Commissioner for a report on Operation Chain and will revert to the Deputy directly when the information is to hand.

Garda Operations

169. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will report on An Garda Síochána's Operation Tugboat; the number of persons arrested and charged to date; the number of successful convictions obtained to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17139/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will ap-

preciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of resources and the conduct of operations.

I have asked the Commissioner for a report on Operation Tugboat and will revert to the Deputy directly when the information is to hand.

Garda Data

170. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí attached to the Garda R and J Districts in each of the years 2015 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17140/18]

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

The areas referred to by the Deputy are part of the Dublin Metropolitan Region (D.M.R.) North Division and I am informed by the Commissioner that the strength of the D.M.R. North Division on 28 February 2018, the latest date for which information is currently available was 666 of whom 201 were assigned to the Garda R District (Coolock District) and 161 to and J District (Raheny District). There are also 43 Garda Reserves and 39 Garda civilian staff attached to the Division. When appropriate, the work of local Gardaí is supported by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Armed Support Unit, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau.

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

Since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, just under 1,800 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, of whom 140 have been assigned to the DMR North Division. Garda numbers, taking account of retirements, increased to 13,551 at the end of 2017 – a net increase of over 600 since the end of 2016.

I am pleased that funding is in place to maintain this high level of investment in the Garda workforce to ensure that the vision of an overall workforce of 21,000 by 2021 remains on track. This year a further 800 new Garda Recruits will enter the Garda College. In total, 800 Garda trainees are scheduled to attest during the year, some 200 of whom attested last month. Further, Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, are on track to reach 14,000 by the end of this year.

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 DMR North Division.

For the information of the Deputy the number of Gardaí assigned to the Coolock District and Raheny District in each of the years 2015 to 2017 and on the 28 February 2018, the latest date for which figures are currently available, is set out in the table.

2015

District	Station	Total Strength
Coolock	Coolock	103
	Malahide	29
	Swords	65
	TOTAL	197
Raheny	Raheny	67
	Clontarf	65
	Howth	27
	TOTAL	159

2016

District	Station	Total Strength
Coolock	Coolock	105
	Malahide	31
	Swords	72
	TOTAL	208
Raheny	Raheny	66
	Clontarf	67
	Howth	27
	TOTAL	160

2017

District	Station	Total Strength
Coolock	Coolock	103
	Malahide	31
	Swords	68
	TOTAL	202
Raheny	Raheny	68
	Clontarf	69
	Howth	26
	TOTAL	163

Garda Youth Diversion Projects

171. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the rational

for amalgamating local youth justice projects into one youth justice programme which will encompass six areas of Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17145/18]

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

As the Deputy is aware, my Department is obliged to carry out a call for proposals process during 2018 in relation to the provision of Garda Youth Diversion Project (GYDP) services, to fully comply with requirements related to the co-funding of projects by the European Social Fund Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014-2020.

To ensure State-wide coverage of GYDP services for young people, (which does not exist at present), the intention is that, in general, service provision will be aligned with Garda Divisions or other appropriate local areas with a distinct community identity as may be agreed during a wide ranging consultation process which is currently ongoing. Issues of community identity and numbers of potential participants on GYDPs in the area will be key considerations here. No final decisions have yet been made in respect of any area.

The provision of GYDP services in all parts of the State has obvious advantages, particularly in terms of providing services for significant numbers of young people who cannot currently access them. In this regard, an independent evaluation report of the operation of an integrated approach to delivery of GYDP services within County Kerry, commissioned by my Department is expected to be finalised shortly. This report will help with the further development GYDP services in the context of the Call for Proposals.

GYDPs deliver valuable services for young people who have committed a crime or may be at risk of offending as well as providing important support for An Garda Síochána at local level. I can assure the Deputy that in the context of the Call for Proposals my Department is committed to ensuring continuity of service for participants on GYDPs and maintain a community driven approach to their operation, as well as minimising any disruption for workers and service providers. In this regard, and in line with the overall objective of providing GYDP services to all children and young persons who require them, I am advised that the Call for Proposals will require applicants to provide for continuity of GYDP services for young people currently participating in the service. Furthermore, the Call for Proposals process will facilitate existing service providers forming consortiums, which could apply to provide services under the new comprehensive approach that is being developed.

GYDPs provide an effective and essential support to the operation of the statutory Garda Diversion Programme by An Garda Síochána. The principal focus of GYDPs is on young people who receive a Garda caution under the Diversion Programme for involvement in criminal or anti-social behaviour and are referred to a local GYDP (primary referrals). GYDPs also accommodate a certain proportion of young people who are considered to be at risk of involvement in offending or anti-social behaviour (secondary referrals).

In relation to secondary referrals, it has to be considered if, in principle, it is appropriate to refer a child to a Garda project where no criminal act has been identified. For some, a better option might be referral to available mainstream youth services that could appropriately support them. That being said, it is accepted that referrals to GYDPs must take account of local needs and issues in relation to access and availability of mainstream youth services. Following the Call for Proposals process, GYDP services will still accommodate secondary referrals and the proportion of these may vary from area to area depending on identified local needs.

My Department is very much aware of the range of concerns expressed in relation to the Call for Proposals process. 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 extensive consultation process which is currently ongoing. 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. In addition, the consultations will include arrangements to hear the views of young people, including participants or former participants on GYDPs.

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 delivery approach have been determined, work is ongoing to complete the full details to be included in the Call for Proposals, which is expected to issue in the second quarter of 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.

Courts Service

172. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the reduction in the rate of interest payable on judgment debts from 8% to 2% enacted by SI 624 of 2016 is applicable to judgments which were made prior to January 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17156/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy is aware, S.I. No. 624 of 2016 Courts Act 1981 (Interest on Judgment Debts) Order 2016 reduced the rate of interest payable on judgment debts from 8% to 2% and this order came into operation on 1 January 2017.

The question raised by the Deputy is one as to the interpretation of the S.I. concerned and the Courts Service has informed me that the interpretation given in court offices is that the reduced interest rate introduced by S.I. No. 624 does not have retrospective effect. The interest rate in effect prior to the new rate will be applied to a judgment debt for any period during which it would have had effect.

Deportation Orders

173. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the procurement process for arranging flights to transport deportees from Ireland to their country of origin; and the airlines and travel agencies involved in transporting deportees. [17168/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): A Deportation Order requires the person concerned to remove themselves from the State and it is only where they fail to do so that the State is forced to remove them and enforce the rule of law. The process leading to deportation is extensive with many avenues of appeal open to persons subject to Deportation Orders, including judicial review in the High Court. Where persons have been identified as a threat to national security by An Garda Síochána, it remains open to me to make Deportation Orders against such persons and I have done so in the past and will continue to do so where appropriate.

The Department of Justice and Equality primarily use the central government air travel

contract for all commercial air travel. This contract was awarded to Club Travel, following a public procurement exercise carried out by the Office of Government Procurement, and came into effect on 1 August 2017. The airlines used will vary depending on such factors as cost, destination and date of travel.

If operational needs demand, the Department may charter a plane for a specific flight and this is procured through a separate tendering process, as required.

Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission Data

174. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of open cases with GSOC by the length of time they have been open, the stage of investigation and the average time between the opening and closing of cases in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17175/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am to inform the Deputy that the information requested is not currently to hand. I have made a request for the information and will write to the Deputy when the report is received.

Garda Deployment

175. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to provide more gardaí to Athy, County Kildare. [17192/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, 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 Athy Garda Station forms part of the Kildare Division. I am informed by the Commissioner that the strength Kildare Division on 28 February 2018, the latest date for which information is readily available, was 357. There are also 20 Garda Reserves and 30 Garda civilian staff attached to the Kildare Division. When appropriate, the work of local Gardaí is supported by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Armed Support Units, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau.

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

Since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, just under 1,800 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide. 85 of this cohort have been assigned to the Kildare Division. Garda numbers, taking account of retirements, increased to 13,551 at the end of 2017 – a net increase of over 600 since the end of 2016.

I am pleased that funding is in place to maintain this high level of investment in the Garda workforce to ensure that the vision of an overall workforce of 21,000 by 2021 remains on track. This year a further 800 new Garda Recruits will enter the Garda College. In total, 800 Garda trainees are scheduled to attest during the year, some 200 of whom attested last month. Further, Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, are on track to reach 14,000 by the end of this year.

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

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

Garda Vetting

176. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to reform the Garda vetting process (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17229/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The National Vetting Bureau processes requests for vetting for prospective employees from relevant organisations, as defined in the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Acts 2012 to 2016, who are registered with the Bureau. Vetting applications can only be submitted via the relevant organisations.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that liaison persons in the relevant organisations are trained by the National Vetting Bureau and they undertake the observance of secure operating procedures with regard to the management of vetting applications and disclosures. The relevant organisations are tasked with verifying the name, address and date of birth of vetting applicants, which must be accompanied by photographic evidence. It is, therefore, the responsibility of the relevant organisations to certify to the National Vetting Bureau that the identity of the vetting applicant has been validated.

I am informed also that compliance with this requirement by relevant organisations is further established by the National Vetting Bureau through audits, inspections and routine requests for proof of validation of identity.

I would note to the Deputy also that it is an offence under the Acts to make a false statement for the purpose of obtaining, or enabling another person to obtain, a vetting disclosure.

Citizenship Applications

177. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the administration costs for an EU citizen to become an Irish citizen; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17243/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The fees to be paid by an applicant for a certificate of naturalisation are governed by the provisions of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 569 of 2011). The application fee, stipulated at €175, is payable on application for a certificate of naturalisation and a certification fee is payable on the issue of a certificate of naturalisation. The standard certification fee is set at €950, while a reduced fee of €200 applies in the case of an application made on behalf of a minor or in certain cases where the application is made by a widow, widower or surviving civil partner of an Irish citizen. In the case of recognised refugees and stateless persons the certification fee is nil.

There is no provision in the Regulations for the discretionary waiver or reduction of fees, or for differing fees to apply to different nationalities. All of the fees payable under the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act are kept under on-going review by my Department; however, there are no plans to amend the fees.

The standard fees payable by an applicant are designed to reflect the effort and cost involved in processing applications for a certificate of naturalisation. The Deputy will be aware that formal citizenship ceremonies have been introduced at no extra cost to applicants. These have been universally well received by participants as the ceremonies provide a sense of dignity and occasion that serves to underscore the importance to both the State and the applicant of the granting of Irish citizenship.

All naturalisation applications - whether from EU citizens or non-EU citizens - are processed entirely in accordance with the provisions of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act and having regard to the particular merits of the application. In view of the many variables involved in processing applications it is not possible to isolate the administrative costs associated with a specific category of naturalisation applicants.

Naturalisation Applications

178. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of applications for naturalisation that are between six months and 1 year, 1 year and 18 months, 18 months and 2 years and over 2 years old; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17257/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that of the applications currently on hands: 4,800 are on hands for less than 6 months; 4,000 for between 6 to 12 months; 2,500 for between 1 year to 18 months; 850 between 18 months to 2 years; and 950 in excess of 2 years.

It should be noted that statistics of the cases on hands will always include a cohort of cases where a decision has been made and the applicant notified of same, but where the applicant has yet to swear their oath of fidelity to the nation and loyalty to the State, as required under the Act, and be granted their certificate of naturalisation at a citizenship ceremony arranged for the purpose. In this context in excess of 3,000 of the cases on hands have already received their decision and my Department is currently issuing invitations to these individuals to attend a citizenship ceremony on 21 May next to make their declaration before a judge and to be granted their certificate of naturalisation.

It is recognised that all applicants for citizenship would wish to have a decision on their application without delay. While most straightforward cases are processed to a decision within

six months, the nature of the naturalisation process is such that, for a broad range of reasons, some cases can take longer than others to process. In some instances, completing the necessary checks may take a considerable period of time. As outlined, while a decision may be made within six months, the certificate cannot be issued until the applicant attends a citizenship ceremony arranged for the purpose of swearing the oath of allegiance before a judge.

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

INIS devotes a considerable amount of its overall resources to the processing of these cases. It also operates a dedicated phone helpline and email helpdesk available for all applicants interested in the progress of their application, details of which are available on the INIS website at www.inis.gov.ie.

Naturalisation Certificates

179. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of certificates of naturalisation issued in 2017 to persons that were born here. [17258/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the records indicate that 450 certificates of naturalisation issued in 2017 to persons that were born on the island of Ireland.

Protected Disclosures

180. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 666 of 11 September 2017 and 329 of 27 February 2018, if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the prison service has lodged an appeal with the LRC relative to the decision taken in the case of a person (details supplied); if he or his Departmental officials had knowledge of this decision to appeal or were consulted before the appeal was lodged; if the matter will be investigated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17286/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised that the IPS has lodged an appeal to the Labour Court in relation to a decision taken by the Workplace Relations Commission in respect of the named Officer. I am further informed that the decision was taken on the basis of legal advice provided to the Prison Service and that my Department was made aware of this advice. As the matter is currently before the Labour Court it would not be appropriate to comment further on the matter.

As the Deputy is aware, in addition to the proceedings that are now before the Labour Court, my Department has engaged an external legal firm to independently examine other complaints set out by the Officer. This process is the subject of correspondence from the officer's legal representatives which is receiving attention.

Legislative Reviews

181. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to review Part 11 or Part 13 of the Criminal Justice Act 2006 in relation to extending anti-social behaviour orders to social media usage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17291/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Law Reform Commission published a report on Harmful Communications and Digital Safety in September 2016.

The Report has two main elements. One part focuses on digital safety and proposes the establishment of an office of Digital Safety Commissioner. The other part of the report addresses the criminal law aspects of harmful communications on the internet and other platforms.

I am analysing the Law Reform Commission's Report, and proposals in relation to harassment and harmful communications currently before the Dáil, with a view to the enactment of legislation to give effect to the criminal law aspects of the Law Reform Commission's report.

As such, I have no plans to review Part 11 or Part 13 of the Criminal Justice Act 2006 to extend anti-social behaviour orders to social media usage.

Anti-Social Behaviour

182. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of juvenile good behaviour contracts issued in each of the years 2007 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17292/18]

183. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of juvenile anti-social behaviour orders issued in each of the years 2007 to 2017 and to date in 2018, under Part 13 of the Criminal Justice Act 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17293/18]

184. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of anti-social behaviour orders issued in each of the years 2007 to 2017 and to date in 2018, under Part 11 of the Criminal Justice Act 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17294/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 182 to 184, inclusive, together.

It has not been possible to answer this question in the time available. I will provide further information to the Deputy in due course.

Residency Permits

185. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of an application for residency in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17362/18]

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

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

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

Naturalisation Applications

186. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of an application for citizenship in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17363/18]

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 certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy was refused for reasons provided to the person concerned in a letter issued on 26 November 2015 advising of the decision. There is no record of a new application for a certificate of naturalisation having been submitted to date. A determination on whether an applicant satisfies the statutory criteria attendant to naturalisation can only be made after an application is received.

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

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

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

Naturalisation Applications

187. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if all stamp 4

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residency credits have been awarded and applied in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17364/18]

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 certificate of naturalisation was received from the person referred to by the Deputy on 18 December 2017. Processing of this application is on-going, with a view to establishing whether the conditions for naturalisation, such as good character and lawful residence, are satisfied.

A letter issued to the person concerned on 21 December 2017 requesting certain documentation with a reminder letter issued on 5 January 2018. Upon receipt of the requested information, the case will be further processed and will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible.

The records indicate that the person's permission to reside in the State expired on 21 July 2016. All non-EEA nationals are required to keep their permission to remain in the State up to date at all times, and to have such permission registered. Failure to do so may adversely affect an application for a certificate of naturalisation.

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.

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

Immigration Status

188. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if stamp 4 will be awarded in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17365/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I refer the Deputy to my previous response to Parliamentary Question No. 120 of 22 February 2018 which, despite a variation in the last name, appears to relate to the same person.

In my previous response to the Deputy I advised that the person concerned should engage with the immigration service. It does appear that they did attend their local immigration office on 25 March 2018 where they were granted temporary permission on Stamp 3 conditions up to 11 June 2018.

In my previous response the person concerned was also advised that in order to allow a full examination of their circumstances they should write to Unit 2, Residence Division, Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service and supply the requested list of documentation and information. I am informed by INIS, that as of to date, Unit 2, Residence Division has no record of the person writing to them.

Can I reiterate that, in order to allow for a full examination of the person's circumstances,

the person concerned be advised again to write directly to Unit 2, Residence Division, Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service, 13-14 Burgh Quay, Dublin 2 supplying the following information and documentation in relation to themselves, their spouse, and any children that might be currently residing in the State.

1. Full copy (all pages) of current and previous passport/s
2. Copy of all GNIB card/s
3. Copy of marriage certificate (if applicable)
4. Brief outline of their history in the State to include when and where they entered the State as well as a brief outline of their current and family circumstances.
5. Their current address.
6. Copy of birth cert for any dependent children.

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

Immigration Status

189. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17366/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned applied for a residence permission and a right to work based on their parentage of an Irish citizen child. A decision letter issued to this person on 22 February 2018.

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

Immigration Status

190. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status and eligibility for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17367/18]

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 was granted a right of residency in the State in 2001 on the basis of family reunification

i.e. as a family member of a recognised refugee. The person's current residency status is under consideration and he will be contacted in due course in this regard.

A determination on whether an applicant satisfies the statutory criteria attendant to naturalisation can only be made after an application is received. 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. Detailed information on naturalisation, including the relevant application forms and guidelines, is available on the INIS website at 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

191. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of an application for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17370/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As I informed the Deputy in PQ 16866 of 18/4/2018, I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the processing of the application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy is on-going. On completion of the necessary processing the application will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible.

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

It is recognised that all applicants for citizenship would wish to have a decision on their application without delay. While most 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.

Family Reunification Applications

192. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if an application for family reunification will be reviewed in the case of a person (details supplied); and if

he will make a statement on the matter. [17372/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Parliamentary Question No. 503 of 17 April, 2018 copied below for ease of reference.

Reply to Parliamentary Question No. 503 on 17 April, 2018 -

I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the application referred to was refused on 20 February 2018, and the applicant was advised accordingly. The applicant was also advised that they could appeal this decision within two months. No appeal has been received as yet.

Should the applicant wish to appeal the decision, they should address the reasons for refusal in any appeal and submit any information or documentation that they wish the Visa Appeals Officer to consider.

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

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

Immigration Status

193. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if submissions have been received in the case of persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17373/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that, in response to a notification pursuant to the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), the persons concerned have not submitted written representations, as previously stated.

The position in the State of the persons concerned will now be decided by reference to the provisions of Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and all other applicable legislation. If any representations are submitted, they will be considered before a final decision is made.

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

Residency Permits

194. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if stamp 4 temporary residency will be granted in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will

make a statement on the matter. [17374/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that it is not possible to identify the person referred to by the Deputy due to the lack of detail provided.

From the details provided, it would appear that the person in question may never have had permission to remain in the State. If it is the case that the person in question has not engaged with the immigration service already they should do so as soon as possible.

In this regard and to allow for a full examination of their circumstances, the person concerned should be advised to write directly to Unit 2, Residence Division, Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service, 13-14 Burgh Quay, Dublin 2 supplying the following documentation and information in relation to themselves, and as applicable, in relation to any spouse or children that might be currently in the State.

1. Full copy (all pages) of current and previous passport/s for all persons
2. Copy of their GNIB card/s
3. Copy of marriage certificate (if applicable)
4. Their current address.
5. Copies of birth certificate of dependent children (if applicable)
6. Letter of offer of employment
7. Brief outline of their history in the State to include when and where they entered the State as well as a brief outline of their current circumstances.

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

Immigration Status

195. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if stamp 4 status will be offered in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17375/18]

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

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

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

established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from the INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Residency Permits

196. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if stamp 4 residency status will be restored in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17376/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have been informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned was refused retention of a Residence Card on 15 July, 2017 as they were not in compliance with the European Communities (Free Movement of Persons) Regulations 2015.

I also understand that INIS received a request for a review of that decision on 16 August, 2017. The Deputy will appreciate that review applications are dealt with in strict chronological order and there will be no avoidable delay in issuing a decision. In the interim, INIS has provided the person with temporary permission to remain in the State under Stamp 4 conditions until 15 August, 2018.

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

Immigration Status

197. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if stamp 4 or appropriate status will be granted in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17377/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that it is not possible to identify the person referred to by the Deputy due to the lack of detail provided.

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

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

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

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Immigration Policy

198. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if an upgrade of stamp 1 to stamp 4 will be considered in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17378/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that they do not offer specific advice to individuals on immigration pathways. In this regard the person concerned should be advised to email Unit2ResidenceDivision@justice.ie or write to Unit 2, Residence Division, Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service, 13-14 Burgh Quay, Dublin 2 in order to allow for a full examination of their circumstances.

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

Deportation Orders

199. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 144 of 15 February 2018, if the matter will be expedited (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17379/18]

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 valid Deportation Order made on 20 June 2002.

Representations were received from the person concerned, pursuant to the provisions of Section 3(11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), requesting that the Deportation Order be revoked. Following the detailed consideration of the information submitted in support of the request, including all representations made around family reunification, the Deportation Order was affirmed on 09 November 2017.

The Deputy should note that having checked records in INIS, that there are no outstanding Family Reunification applications in respect of the person concerned.

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

Immigration Status

200. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17380/18]

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 16th December, 2010. That Order remains valid and in place.

The person concerned made a request, pursuant to the provisions of section 3(11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), to have that Order revoked. Following the detailed consideration of the request made, a decision was taken to affirm the Order and that decision was communicated to the person concerned by letter dated 16th June, 2017.

The person concerned lodged judicial review proceedings in the High Court, challenging the decision to affirm her Deportation Order. The High Court gave its Judgment in the matter on 23rd January, 2018. The High Court did not set aside the decision to affirm the Deportation Order but instead directed that certain specified matters be re-examined. I am advised that this Judgment is being examined by the relevant personnel in the INIS at the present time. Once this process has been completed, the case of the person concerned can be given more detailed consideration.

I am also advised that, separately, the person concerned has sought to be re-admitted to the international protection process. This request is under consideration at present. The Deputy might wish to note that the decision to ensue from the consideration of this request will be to re-admit or to refuse to re-admit the person concerned to the international protection process. Once such a decision has been made, this decision will be notified in writing.

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.

Legislative Reviews

201. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to review the Consumer Protection Act 2007 to strengthen misleading information provisions in relation to the growth of online bloggers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17295/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The provisions on misleading commercial practices in the Consumer Protection Act 2007 give effect to the provisions of Directive 2005/29/EC on Unfair Business-to-Consumer Commercial Practices. With the exception of commercial practices in the area of financial services, the Directive is a maximum harmonization measure whose provisions cannot be exceeded or supplemented in the national laws of Member States. It is not open to me consequently to review the Act for the purpose proposed by the Deputy. One of the main concerns about online blogs relates to the fact that bloggers may not always disclose that they are being paid to promote products. A misleading practice of this kind is covered by Section 55(1)(x) of the Act which provides that it is a prohibited commercial practice for a trader to make a representation or create an impression that the trader -

(i) is not acting for purposes relating to the trader's trade, business or profession when the trader is so acting, or

(ii) is acting as a consumer when the trader is not.

The European Commission have recently published a proposal for a Directive to amend Directive 2005/29/EC and other consumer protection Directives. While the proposed amendments do not directly address the issue of misleading information on online blogs, the discussions on the proposal may provide an opportunity to raise possible concerns about this issue.

IDA Ireland Site Visits

202. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of IDA site visits in each county in quarter 1 of 2018, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17302/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): IDA Ireland continues to highlight the benefits of expanding or locating in all counties of Ireland to its client base. It is important to remember, however, that the final decision as to where to invest always rests with the company concerned. It is also the case that site visit activity does not necessarily reflect investment potential, as at least 70% of all new FDI comes from existing IDA Ireland client companies.

Site visits nevertheless do represent an important tool through which investors can be encouraged to invest in regional areas and the IDA always does its utmost to ensure that investors consider all potential locations when visiting Ireland.

The table sets out details on the number of IDA Ireland site visits to each county in 2017. Figures for Quarter 1 2018 will be compiled by the end of April.

County	2017
Dublin	327
Kildare	10
Meath	3
Wicklow	2
Laois	4
Longford	7
Offaly	5
Westmeath	42
Clare	22
Limerick	42
Tipperary	8
Cavan	2
Louth	22
Monaghan	1
Donegal	2
Leitrim	5
Sligo	18
Carlow	8
Kilkenny	6
Waterford	11
Wexford	3

County	2017
Cork	51
Kerry	9
Galway	62
Mayo	7
Roscommon	3
Total	682

IDA Ireland Portfolio

203. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation further to Parliamentary Question No. 112 of 25 January 2018, the available IDA lands at the end of quarter 1 of 2018; the occupied IDA lands at the end of quarter 1 of 2018, by county and town in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17303/18]

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

The following tables list all IDA Ireland land available for marketing (Table A) and occupied IDA Ireland properties (Table B) as at the end of Quarter 4 of 2017. Further to Parliamentary Question No. 112 of 25 January 2018, I am informed by IDA Ireland that the most up to date information in relation to occupied and available IDA lands is from Q4 2017.

Table A

Property County	Property Town	Property Name	Hectares Available
County Carlow	Bagenalstown	Bagenalstown	0.1555
County Cavan	Cavan	Cavan B&T Park	9.05
County Cork	Youghal	Springfield Estate	1.87
County Cork	Youghal	Foxhole	1.0063
County Cork	Skibbereen	Poundlick Estate	3.86
County Cork	Kanturk	Mallow B & T Park	0.6831
County Cork	Kinsale	Rathhallikeen	0.1298
County Cork	Kanturk	Pulleen	2.47
County Cork	Fermoy	Rathealy	0.9407
County Cork	Cork City	Cork City Kilbarry B&T Park	57.53
County Cork	Carrigtohill	Carrigtohill B&T Park	11.08
County Cork	Charleville	Rathgoggan Estate	1.86
County Cork	Bantry	Drombrow	1.9627
County Cork	Bandon	Laragh Estate	1.37
County Cork	Cork City	Ringaskiddy	149.32
County Cork	Cork City	Cork B&T Park	0.42

Property County	Property Town	Property Name	Hectares Available
County Cork	Cork City	Ringaskiddy Estate	0.2023
County Cork	Cork City	Rossa Ave	0.1152
County Cork	Millstreet	Millstreet IDA Estate	0.1133
County Cork	Fermoy	Fermoy B & T Park	6.05
County Cork	Carrigtohill East	Cork Carrigtohill East	53.1576
County Donegal	Ballyshannon	Ballyshannon	1.0672
County Donegal	Donegal/Tully/Clar/B	Lurganboy	0.872
County Donegal	Letterkenny	Knocknamona	1.35
County Donegal	Letterkenny/Manorcun	Letterkenny B & T Park	19.33
County Donegal	Letterkenny/Manorcun	Letterkenny Lisnenan 2	0.38
County Donegal	Letterkenny/Manorcun	Letterkenny B & T Park	2.6282
County Dublin	Dublin 24	Dublin 24 - Whites-town Ind Est	0.56
County Dublin	Dublin 11	Dublin 11 - Poppintree Ind. Est.	3.78
County Dublin	Blanchardstown	Cruiserath	27.1925
County Dublin	Blanchardstown	Blanchardstown B & T Park	10.4956
County Dublin	Dublin 12	Dubl 12 - Ballymount Ind. Est.	0.0249
County Dublin	Swords	Swords Bus. Park, Greenfields	2.04
County Dublin	Dublin 5	Belcamp - B & T Park	46.44
County Galway	Tuam	Tuam Business Park	1.4794
County Galway	Roundstone	Roundstone	1.42
County Galway	Mountbellew/Ballygar	Mountbellew Business Park	0.1979
County Galway	Gort	Gort Business Park	1.1217
County Galway	Glenamaddy	Glenamaddy Business Park	0.9105
County Galway	Galway City	Parkmore B&T Park (W&E)	26.75
County Galway	Ballygar	Ballygar Site	3.4398
County Galway	Ballinasloe	Ballinasloe B&T Park	8.88
County Galway	Tuam	Tuam Science & Technology Park	9.92
County Galway	Galway City	Oranmore Science & Tech Park	26.78
County Galway	Athenry	Athenry	92.4351

Questions - Written Answers

Property County	Property Town	Property Name	Hectares Available
County Kerry	Killorglin	Farrantoreen	0.74
County Kerry	Killarney	Killarney B&T Park	1.14
County Kerry	Tralee	Acq c.1.0Ha Tralee	1
County Kildare	Newbridge	Newbridge Business Park	2.9339
County Kilkenny	Kilkenny	Purcellsinch Ind. Park	3.95
County Kilkenny	Kilkenny/Bennets-brid	Kilkenny B&T Park	13.4
County Kilkenny	Belview	Belview	22.8
County Laois	Portlaoise	Portlaoise B&T Park	9.62
County Leitrim	Carrick-On-Shannon	Carrick-On-Shannon B & T Park	6.4
County Leitrim	Carrick-On-Shannon	Carrick-On-Shannon	0.1845
County Leitrim	Drumshanbo	Drumshanbo	0.2238
County Leitrim	Manorhamilton	Manorhamilton	0.9264
County Leitrim	Manorhamilton	Carrickleitrim	0.4208
County Leitrim	Mohill	Mohill	2.0693
County Limerick	Limerick	The National Technology Park	64.72
County Limerick	Limerick	Raheen Business Park	53.86
County Longford	Longford	Aghafad	2.0272
County Longford	Longford	Longford Industrial Estate	1.0176
County Louth	Greenore	Greenore	0.0272
County Louth	Dundalk	Dundalk Finnabair B&T Park	5.74
County Louth	Dundalk/Ravensdale	Dundalk Mullagharlin East	12.8
County Louth	Dundalk	Dundalk Mullagharlin	44.175
County Louth	Drogheda	Drogheda B&T Park	22.53
County Mayo	Ballina	Ballina Business Park	0.6
County Mayo	Bangor Erris	Bango Erris Industrial Park	0.607
County Mayo	Castlebar	Castlebar B&T Park	3.0897
County Mayo	Foxford	Foxford Business Park	0.6798
County Mayo	Ballina	Ballina	10.6141
County Meath	Navan Boyerstown Bro	Navan B&T Park	24.21
County Monaghan	Monaghan	Monaghan Business Park	7.53

Property County	Property Town	Property Name	Hectares Available
County Offaly	Tullamore	Tullamore Industrial Estate	0.3541
County Offaly	Tullamore	Tullamore B&T Park	8
County Offaly	Clara	Clara	0.4872
County Roscommon	Roscommon	Roscommon B&T Park	4.63
County Roscommon	Castlerea	Station Rd	1.1735
County Sligo	Sligo	Cleveragh Business Park	0.3035
County Sligo	Easkey	Easkey Business Park	0.0611
County Sligo	Sligo	Finisklin B & T Park	10.97
County Sligo	Sligo	Sligo - Oakfield Site	31.3186
County Tipperary	Tipperary	Knockanrawley	2.08
County Tipperary	Clonmel	Clonmel Bus Park	20.071
County Waterford	Waterford	Waterford Industrial Estate	5.19
County Waterford	Waterford	Waterford B&T Park	23.88
County Waterford	Dungarvan	Dungarvan B & T Park	11.5675
County Westmeath	Mullingar	Clonmore Ind. Est.	6.8
County Westmeath	Athlone	Athlone B&T Park Garrycastle	11.3647
County Westmeath	Athlone	Garrankesh Estate	0.0926
County Westmeath	Mullingar	Mullingar B&T Park	22.5
County Wexford	Wexford	Wexford B&T Park	3.14
County Wexford	Wexford	Wexford Whitemills	0.066
County Wexford	Enniscorthy	Moyne Upper	0.39
County Wicklow	Arklow	Arklow Kilbride	0.1197
County Wicklow	Greystones	Greystones B&T Park	17.93
County Wicklow	Arklow	Arklow B&T Park	14.56

Table B

Property Name	Property Town	Property County
Cootehill	Cootehill	County Cavan
Mallow Quarterstown Estate	Mallow	County Cork
Brookpark	Dunmanway	County Cork
Underhill	Dunmanway	County Cork
Mahon Estate	Cork City	County Cork
Little Island Estate	Cork City	County Cork
Ballincollig	Cork City	County Cork
Plot 4 Roadway	Cork	County Cork
Letterkenny Ballyraine	Letterkenny/Manorcun	County Donegal
Windyhall	Letterkenny	County Donegal

Questions - Written Answers

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

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

Brexit Issues

204. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if the strategic communications unit in the Department the Taoiseach will co-ordinate a national Brexit preparedness public information and awareness campaign in 2018 (details supplied); if meetings have taken place between her Departmental officials and advisers and State agencies under her remit with the strategic communications unit since this announcement; the body that will carry out this campaign if the unit is no longer in a position to complete this action; and the budget for this campaign. [17304/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Government's extensive response to Brexit is already underway and includes measures such as:

- Enterprise Ireland's €5,000 'Be Prepared' grant for firms;
- Enterprise Ireland's Brexit Scorecard;
- Bord Bia's Brexit Barometer;
- InterTrade Ireland's Brexit Advisory Service;
- the €300m Brexit Loan Scheme for Business;
- the €25m Brexit Response Loan Scheme for the agri-food sector;
- and the opening of six new diplomatic missions as part of *Global Footprint 2025* .

One of the aims of the Action Plan for Jobs 2018 (APJ 2018) is to ensure Ireland's enterprise base can be successful amid the uncertainty created by Brexit. The APJ2018 therefore sets out actions around increasing national, sectoral and firm level preparedness to ensure that companies exposed to Brexit anticipate the need for change, respond and adapt. This includes a national Brexit preparedness public information and awareness campaign.

As stated in the APJ2018, this campaign will involve my Department along with the Departments of An Taoiseach, Foreign Affairs & Trade, and other relevant Departments and Agencies. Plans for the campaign remain under consideration. None of my officials, advisers nor the State agencies under my Department's aegis have met the Strategic Communications Unit since the launch of the APJ2018 on March 9th 2018.

Skills Development

205. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the measures she is taking to enhance enterprise policy to upskill workers in employment; and the actions set out in the action plan for jobs 2018 and in Enterprise 2025 Renewed towards this objective. [17305/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department's enterprise policy has a strong focus on upskilling workers in employment. This can be seen in numerous ways including through policy documents such as the Action Plan for Jobs 2018 and Enterprise 2025 Renewed, and through my Department's continued engagement with the Department of Education and Skills.

The Action Plan for Jobs 2018 has four immediate key aims. One of which is ensuring that workforce have the incentives and skills needed to prosper. The APJ has a dedicated chapter on participation, employment and meeting skills needs. Actions on enhancing enterprise policy to upskill workers in employment include:

The Roll out of the Skills for Growth Programme: Skills for Growth will include a package of supports for employers to help them understand and plan for their skills needs. This will include workshops to support companies to identify skills gaps and develop company skills plans, access to a new skills audit tool, and one-on-one assistance from a Regional Skills Forum Manager to use this tool and plan for the future.

Develop training initiatives to improve in-company capability: This will involve the implementation of the Finance Pillar of Enterprise Ireland's Client Engagement Model for assessing client's financial management capability their need for appropriate short and long-term funding.

Aligning skills supply with enterprise needs: This will be achieved through the support of up to 6,200 apprenticeship registrations, 3,900 traineeship enrolments and development of 10 new apprenticeship programmes in sectors of the economy with identified skills needs. This will also include engagement with SME owners and managers with the view to develop a Management Development offering and a competitive call to HEIs for proposals for Springboard+ courses.

Publish and implement successor to the ICT Skills Action Plan: The availability of appropriate skills for developing, implementing and using information and communication technology (ICT) is an important condition for the competitiveness and innovation of the economy. My Department is working in conjunction with the Department of Education and Skills on producing a successor to the 2014-2018 ICT Action Plan.

Conduct and publish a study on Skills for the Digital Economy: The acquisition of new skills is vital to keep pace with advances in technology and the availability of the right skills is a key enabler of enterprise performance and growth. The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs will undertake this study to ensure that the workforce is equipped with the requisite skills to fully unlock the benefits of the digital economy.

Enterprise 2025 Renewed reaffirms that the fundamentals of our enterprise policy remain sound – export-led growth underpinned by innovation and talent. The Review, taken in the context of more recent global change, has placed a priority on talent and skills.

The strategy sets out a range of actions many of which are being progressed by my Department (and others by the Department of Education and Skills) as appropriate. They include:

Addressing the likely increased demand for new skills post-Brexit including customs, logistics, risk management, supply chain management, international selling and foreign technical language capability, based on analysis to identify specific actions needed.

Engaging with enterprise to deliver impactful initiatives that meet the changing needs of business through a refocused National Training Fund, taking into consideration delivery throughout the regions of Ireland, to deliver skills-based employment that can support produc-

tivity-led wage increases.

Expanding the reach, engagement and impact of the Regional Skills Fora to build on progress made to date.

Providing alternative education and training options through secondary schools, work places etc., to help people make the right choices for themselves and to stimulate continuous learning.

Through the actions and initiatives mentioned above, my Department and the Department of Education and Skills will continue to ensure that enterprise policy supports the upskilling of those in employment to allow for an adequate and appropriately skilled workforce.

Credit Guarantee Scheme Data

206. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the value of drawdowns issued under the credit guarantee scheme on 31 December 2016 and 31 December 2017; and the value of approvals for the same period of each drawdown and approval by county in tabular form. [17306/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Credit Guarantee Scheme (CGS) has been in operation since 2012, and as of 31 December 2017, 530 loans to the value of €84,396,594 have been sanctioned by participating lenders under the scheme. The CGS is currently operated on behalf of the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation by the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI).

While the benefit of a guarantee is offered to a borrower under the scheme, some borrowers do not proceed with the guarantee. A significant number of cases are listed as 'Pending' by the participating lenders, and the operator only holds partial information on such cases. As a result, it is not possible to quantify the drawdowns of loans considered under the scheme. A breakdown of sanctioned loans where county information is known is provided in the attached document.

In addition, Quarterly Reports providing full details of the latest Credit Guarantee Scheme performance are published on my Department's website www.dbei.gov.ie.

Modification to the Credit Guarantee Scheme legislation was provided for in Statutory Instruments in late 2017 to give effect to necessary changes in the operation of the Scheme. I would expect that these changes will see enhanced use of the scheme in future years.

The CGS is one element of a suite of supports which when combined with other Government initiatives such as Microfinance Ireland, the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland, the Credit Review Office and the Prompt Payment Code should enable companies to expand, service new markets and grow employment.

I note that the amount of lending sanctioned under the credit guarantee scheme for the 12 months to 31 December 2017 was €19,726,700.

2017

Year	No. Of Facilities Sanctioned	Amount of CGS Facilities Sanctioned
2012	6	€582,000

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Year	No. Of Facilities Sanctioned	Amount of CGS Facilities Sanctioned
2013	88	€12,107,500
2014	68	€9,283,344
2015	108	€20,385,050
2016	131	€22,312,000
2017	129	€19,726,700
Total as at 31st December 2017	530	€84,396,594

Status	No. of CGS Facilities	Amount of Lending
CGS loans sanctioned by Lenders since launch	530	€84,396,594
Declined or Cancelled by the customer	67	€11,171,250
Declined by the lender	3	€180,000
Ineligible	3	€467,000
CGS Facilities at 31st December 2017	457	€72,578,344

County	Amount of Lending
Carlow	€1,770,000
Cavan	€0
Clare	€927,000
Cork	€5,076,000
Donegal	€197,000
Dublin	€31,981,200
Galway	€3,780,500
Kerry	€2,610,000
Kildare	€4,512,000
Kilkenny	€0
Laois	€1,606,950
Leitrim	€1,000,000
Limerick	€7,445,594
Longford	€0
Louth	€1,637,000
Mayo	€953,100
Meath	€1,535,000
Monaghan	€250,000
Offaly	€790,000
Roscommon	€80,000
Sligo	€57,000
Tipperary	€1,121,000
Waterford	€1,000,000
Westmeath	€1,522,000
Wexford	€1,266,000
Wicklow	€1,461,000

County	Amount of Lending
Total	€72,578,344

2016

Year	No. Of Facilities Sanctioned	Amount of CGS Facilities Sanctioned
2012	6	€582,000
2013	88	€12,107,500
2014	68	€9,283,344
2015	108	€20,385,050
2016	131	€22,772,000
Total as at 31st December 2016	401	€64,669,894

Status	No. of CGS Facilities	Amount of Lending
CGS loans sanctioned by Lenders since launch	401	€64,669,894
Declined or Cancelled by the customer	62	€10,615,000
Declined by the lender	3	€180,000
Ineligible	3	€467,000
CGS Facilities at 31st December 2016	333	€53,407,894

County	Amount of Lending
Carlow	€1,770,000
Cavan	€0
Clare	€667,000
Cork	€3,348,000
Donegal	€197,000
Dublin	€24,182,000
Galway	€2,241,500
Kerry	€1,210,000
Kildare	€3,285,000
Kilkenny	€295,000
Laois	€1,916,950
Leitrim	€1,000,000
Limerick	€4,375,344
Longford	€0
Louth	€1,160,000
Mayo	€733,100
Meath	€795,000
Monaghan	€250,000
Offaly	€540,000
Roscommon	€80,000
Sligo	€57,000
Tipperary	€1,071,000

County	Amount of Lending
Waterford	€750,000
Westmeath	€1,057,000
Wexford	€1,266,000
Wicklow	€1,161,000

Job Losses

207. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the actions she has taken to protect jobs at a company (details supplied); the supports in place for employees that will be made redundant; if she has spoken with the management of the company regarding these job losses; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17307/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I am very conscious of the anxiety that the announcement of possible job losses by the company concerned creates for the workers there. My first thoughts are with these workers and their families as well as their local communities as they receive this difficult news.

I understand that the company in question are planning to achieve cost savings by driving simplification of its products and processes to deliver greater efficiency across its operating systems. They are seeking to realign their cost bases to match the leaner and more agile organisation that they need to become. Therefore, they are proposing a voluntary incentivised exit scheme which will be open to most employees. It is proposed that any redundancies that will result because of the restructure will be on a voluntary basis and the locations will depend on the level of uptake.

Regarding these possible job losses, Ireland has a robust suite of employment rights legislation, which offers extensive protections to employees. The Workplace Relations Commission is mandated to secure compliance with employment rights legislation. Workplace Relations information personnel are available to meet staff of the affected companies, either individually or collectively, to discuss their employment rights. The Workplace Relations Customer Service Section can be contacted at <http://www.workplacerelations.ie> or Lo-call: 1890 80 80 90. The website also provides extensive information on employment rights.

In addition, the State provides industrial relations mechanisms to assist parties in their efforts to resolve any differences they may have.

I understand that the company concerned is not a client of the State Development Agencies, Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland, or the Local Enterprise Offices.

Employment retention and creation continues to be the primary objective of this Government and we have been working hard to create the improved economic conditions which will support the maintenance of existing jobs and the creation of new ones. Since becoming Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, I have made jobs and enterprise in the regions my top priority.

The Regional Action Plan for Jobs initiative is a central pillar of the Government's ambition to create 200,000 new jobs by 2020. A key objective of each of the 8 regional plans is to have a further 10 to 15 per cent at work in each region by 2020, with the unemployment rate of each region not more than one percentage point greater than the national average. Progress across the eight regions has been very positive since the launch of the initiative, with an increase in employment of 8.5% or 118,600 jobs in the regions outside of Dublin and 166,800 additional

jobs nationwide, from Q1 2015 to Q2 2017.

The Local Enterprise offices - or LEOs - are available to support anyone with a business idea and who wants to consider entrepreneurship as a career option. I would urge anyone who was made redundant or who is in danger of losing their job to contact with their local LEO to explore available options. Further information can be found on the LEO website at *www.local-enterprise.ie*.

I am confident that the measures outlined in the Regional Action Plans for Jobs together with other policies being pursued by the State agencies and the Local Enterprise Offices will continue to support enterprise development and provide employment opportunities.

Research and Development Data

208. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the most recent data for Ireland's ranking in each international table for research and development; and the target originally set by the Government for each such ranking in tabular form. [17309/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Innovation 2020, Ireland's strategy for research and development, science and technology, sets out Ireland's ambition to be a Global Innovation Leader. Benchmarking Ireland's performance against other comparable economies is a key tool to enable the delivery of that ambition and to enable us to develop steps to improve our comparative performance.

The European Commission annually produces the European Innovation Scoreboard which sets out Member States' performance against a range of indicators and assists countries in tracking progress and identifying priorities. The 2017 Scoreboard was published by the European Commission in June 2017, with Ireland placed 10th overall and categorised as a Strong Innovator, performing above the EU average. The Commission noted that Ireland's performance increased strongly (6.9 percentage points).

Ireland remains the overall leader in the innovators dimension which demonstrates how innovative Irish SMEs are as European leaders in product, process and marketing innovation. In addition, Ireland achieved first place in the employment impacts dimension which captures employment in knowledge intensive activities and in fast-growing sectors.

Ireland also performs very well in the Human Resources dimension, in particular in the sub-indicator of population with tertiary education where Ireland scores higher than all of those Member States in the Innovation Leader group.

While Ireland has not set specific targets for other international rankings, my Department closely monitors performance on a number of other indices and scoreboards, such as:

The Global Innovation Index (June 2017) in which Ireland is ranked 10th out of 128 countries. Within this, Ireland is placed first for knowledge diffusion and second for knowledge impact.

In the IMD World Competitiveness Yearbook (June 2017) Ireland is ranked 6th out of 63 countries, and is recognised as the second most competitive economy within the EU and Euro area. Ireland achieved top ranking position in a number of important sub indicators including investment incentives, labour productivity, flexibility and adaptability, and attracting and retaining talent.

According to IBM Global Location Trends (August 2017), Ireland remains the number one destination for value for money from foreign direct investment.

With regard to scientific rankings, Ireland is placed 11th globally for overall scientific research quality (Thomson Reuters Essential Science Indicators, June 2017), achieving second place in nanotechnology, animal and dairy, and immunology.

Research and Development Data

209. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the ranking of Ireland in the EU on total public expenditure on research and development based on the most recent data; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17310/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The tables attached show that Ireland ranks 15th out of 28 EU countries in terms of Government Budget Allocations for R&D (GBARD) in 2016 and 18th out of 28 EU countries in terms of its GBARD as a percentage of total Government expenditure in 2016. 2016 is the latest data available. Source of data: Eurostat.

-	GEO/TIME	2016
	European Union (current composition)	94,942.90
	Euro area (19 countries)	73,166.04
1	Germany (until 1990 former territory of the FRG)	27,470.45
2	France	14,048.17
3	United Kingdom	12,504.21
4	Italy	8,734.10
5	Spain	6,055.26
6	Netherlands	4,926.04
7	Sweden	3,631.78
8	Austria	2,875.71
9	Belgium	2,686.30
10	Denmark	2,562.22
11	Finland	1,836.42
12	Portugal	1,678.81
13	Czech Republic	1,035.15
14	Greece	946.26
15	Ireland	719.30
16	Poland	678.70
17	Romania	475.97
18	Hungary	449.52
19	Croatia	343.47
20	Luxembourg	324.21
21	Slovakia	302.26
22	Slovenia	162.77
23	Estonia	145.15

-	GEO/TIME	2016
24	Lithuania	122.18
25	Bulgaria	95.85
26	Cyprus	59.79
27	Latvia	52.60
28	Malta	20.25

Share of government budget appropriations or outlays on research and development % of total general government expenditure

-	geo\time	2016
1	Portugal	2.01
2	Germany	1.98
3	Denmark	1.73
4	Estonia	1.72
5	Netherlands	1.61
6	Austria	1.61
7	Sweden	1.57
8	Croatia	1.56
9	Finland	1.53
10	Czech Republic	1.49
11	Luxembourg	1.45
	Euro area (19 countries)	1.42
	EU (28 countries)	1.37
12	Spain	1.28
13	United Kingdom	1.25
14	Belgium	1.19
15	France	1.12
16	Greece	1.10
17	Italy	1.05
18	Ireland	0.97
19	Lithuania	0.92
20	Slovenia	0.90
21	Slovakia	0.90
22	Cyprus	0.86
23	Hungary	0.84
24	Romania	0.81
25	Latvia	0.58
26	Bulgaria	0.57
27	Malta	0.54
28	Poland	0.39

Research and Development Data

210. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the level of public research and development intensity as measured as a percentage of GDP in each of the years 2005 to 2017; and the figure budgeted for in 2018, in tabular form. [17311/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Government Budget Allocations for R&D (GBARD) as a percentage of GDP, GNP and the GBARD trend 2005-2017 are available at the link below. Estimates for 2018 are not available yet as the R and D Budget Survey 2018 is currently in the field.

[GBARD].

Research and Development Data

211. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the capital expenditure in public research and development in each of the years 2005 to 2017; the figure budgeted for in 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17312/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The attached table shows capital expenditure for publicly funded R and D in Ireland for 2005-2017. In addition to Irish Government funding, capital R and D expenditure is funded by the European Commission. These figures are also shown in the table. The figure for 2018 is not yet available as the R and D Budget Survey is in the field.

€ thousands	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Ireland Total Public Capital R&D Expenditure	113,933.5	94,351.5	163,370.5	187,835.6	138,298.0	112,736.0	85,100.0
Of which:							
European Commission Capital Funding	1,703.0	225.0	2,901.0	3,936.0	1,733.0	1,176.0	1,697.0

table contd.

€ thousands	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Ireland Total Public Capital R&D Expenditure	72,413.0	58,768.0	66,681.0	75,812.0	71,350.0	93,125.0
Of which:						
European Commission Capital Funding	1,408.0	1,460.0	656.0	1,407.0	1,962.0	1,737.0

Brexit Supports

212. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if further Exchequer funding was allocated to the Brexit loan scheme and her views on whether it would reduce the interest rate further. [17318/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Brexit Loan Scheme launched on 28 March provides affordable financing to eligible Irish businesses either currently impacted by Brexit or which will be in the future. The €300 million scheme is being delivered by the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) through participating finance providers (currently Bank of Ireland and Ulster Bank, with AIB to follow in June) to get much needed working capital into Irish businesses.

The finance is easier to access, more competitively priced and at more favourable terms than current offerings, with a maximum interest rate of 4%. This maximum rate of 4% represents a substantial discount for working capital loans compared to current market offerings. It is also likely to incentivise competition amongst on-lenders, which would yield long-term structural benefits for Irish businesses, by supporting the development of a functioning and competitive commercial market. If the financing provided by the scheme is at too low a rate, there is the potential of distorting the wider credit market and irresponsibly creating a dependence on artificially low interest rates. Further reductions in the rate could also give rise to State aid issues.

Economic Competitiveness

213. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her views on the National Competitiveness Council's recommendation to undertake a benchmarking exercise comparing Ireland's performance across a range of key competitiveness metrics with the UK; if this has been completed; and if not, the reason therefor. [17319/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The National Competitiveness Council (NCC) reports to Government on key competitiveness and productivity issues facing the economy and offers recommendations on policy actions required to enhance Ireland's competitiveness. The NCC is independent of Government and under its Terms of Reference is responsible for the management and direction of its own work programme.

Since the UK referendum, the NCC has addressed the implications of Brexit in several publications. The Council's Competitiveness Challenge 2016 report published in December 2016 contained a specific chapter in relation to Brexit. This outlined a range of issues which will require policy attention to support Irish firms trading with or dependent on UK markets, and to ensure that Ireland is best placed to withstand the challenges posed by Brexit. With regard to the Council's recommendation that a benchmarking exercise comparing Ireland's performance across a range of key competitiveness metrics with the UK, the Council published a report *Benchmarking Competitiveness: Ireland and the UK* in April 2017, which provides an assessment of Ireland's current competitiveness performance with specific reference to the UK, to establish areas where policy attention could enhance Ireland's competitiveness.

Throughout 2017 and into 2018 the NCC in its work and reports has continued to place an increased policy emphasis on Irish competitiveness relative to the UK and to benchmarking Ireland's relative performance with specific reference to the UK.

Joint Labour Committees

214. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the status of the review of the seven joint labour committees by the Labour Court. [17320/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy

Pat Breen): Section 41A of the Industrial Relations Act 1946 as amended by Section 11 of the Industrial Relations (Amendment) Act 2012 provides that reviews of each Joint Labour Committee (JLC) will be carried out by the Labour Court, as soon as practicable after the commencement of the Act, and at least once every 5 years thereafter. The first such review was completed in April 2013.

The second review of the JLC's is currently under way and in this context, the Labour Court launched a public consultation process on 16 March seeking submissions from interested parties. The deadline for receipt of submissions was 6 April 2018. The Labour Court is required to conclude its review by 22 April 2018 and to report to me in that timeframe.

The review by the Labour Court will consider whether any JLC should be abolished, maintained in its current form, amalgamated with another JLC or have its establishment order amended. Having completed its review, the Labour Court will make recommendations to me and, if satisfied that the Court has complied with the requirements of the Act, and I consider it appropriate to do so, I will make Orders in the terms of the recommendations.

Enterprise Ireland Investments

215. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if she will report on Enterprise Ireland's capital investment initiative. [17322/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): In early 2015, Enterprise Ireland launched the Capital Investment Initiative to assist client companies improve productivity and competitiveness through the acquisition of new capital equipment and technology. This initiative, which is targeted at manufacturing and/or an internationally traded services SMEs, provides grant aid of up to a maximum of €250,000. Approved funding under this initiative can be used to purchase new or second-hand equipment including reasonable direct installation costs - second hand equipment must be less than 7 years old and more than €10,000 in value. Refurbished equipment will be evaluated on a case by case basis by Enterprise Ireland Assessor.

In 2018 Enterprise Ireland will run 11 Capital Investment Initiative calls throughout the year. Submitted projects are assessed by the Capital Investment Initiative Committee based on the company's application, financial information and a Commercial Assessment of the project. The approval process takes approximately 8 weeks.

Since the Capital Investment Initiative was launched in 2015 Enterprise Ireland has approved 167 projects to 157 companies under the Initiative. Enterprise Ireland do not report on the number of applications received in any of their competitions. Details of approvals are set out in the table.

Year	Total Approved
2015	49
2016	63
2017	37
2018 (1 Jan to 18 April 2018)	18
Total	167

Services for People with Disabilities

216. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health if reports from parents of children attending a school (details supplied) will be examined; the contractual changes that have taken place since 2017 that may have led to this deficit in services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17133/18]

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.

Assisted Human Reproduction

217. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the action that has been taken on each of the recommendations from the Commission on Assisted Human Reproduction; and his further plans in this regard. [17325/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The report of the Commission on Assisted Human Reproduction provided a range of recommendations in relation to the regulation of AHR. The principles encompassed within the Commission's recommendations were taken into consideration during the development of the General Scheme on AHR and are broadly reflected in the provisions of the General Scheme of the Assisted Human Reproduction Bill 2017.

The General Scheme of the Assisted Human Reproduction Bill 2017 encompasses the regulation of a range of practices, including: gamete (sperm or egg) and embryo donation for AHR and research; surrogacy; pre-implantation genetic diagnosis (PGD) of embryos; posthumous assisted reproduction; and embryo and stem cell research. The General Scheme also provides for the establishment of an independent regulatory authority for AHR.

The introduction of legislation in relation to AHR and associated research is a priority for me and officials in my Department are engaging with the Office of the Attorney General in relation to the process of drafting this Bill. In addition, the Joint Committee on Health is currently conducting a review of the General Scheme of the Assisted Human Reproduction Bill 2017 as part of the pre-legislative scrutiny process, which began in January of this year.

Mental Health Services

218. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Health the measures being taken to improve CAMHS, for example, access, age-appropriate placements, waiting lists and standardised operating procedures. [16231/18]

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.

Mental Health Services

219. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Health the way in which the HSE is addressing the diagnosis and treatment of co-morbidity between addiction and mental health teams. [16233/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The HSE Mental Health Division, along with the Clinical Strategy and Programmes Division and subsequently with the College of Psychiatrists of Ireland, have recognised the need for a Clinical Programme for Dual Diagnosis to respond to people with substance misuse, both alcohol and/or drugs, together with mental illness. The Primary Care Division has already appointed a National Clinical Lead for the Addiction Services to improve its response to drug and alcohol abuse at primary care level and this Clinical Lead will work with the Mental Health Clinical Lead to develop a cohesive programme for those with a dual diagnosis.

A Programme Manager was appointed in December 2016, and Dr William Flannery has commenced work as National Clinical Lead for this Clinical Programme. A literature review and clinical service mapping exercise has commenced. The National Working Group held its first meeting mid-October 2017, and has initiated a work plan to develop a Model of Care based on a Programmatic approach to service improvement and development. The National Working Group is made up of key stakeholders with clinical, service user and service provider expertise, and is chaired by Dr Flannery.

The aims of this Programme are to develop a standardised evidence based approach to the identification, assessment and treatment of comorbid mental illness and substance misuse.

These include:

- Increasing awareness of the frequent coexistence of mental illness and substance misuse
- Ensuring there is a clear clinical pathway for management of people with such a dual diagnosis including when they present to Emergency Departments
- Ensuring a standardised service is provided throughout the country
- Ensuring adolescents are also included within the scope of this Clinical Programme.

The combination of mental illness and substance misuse is, as the comorbidity suggests, associated with a high degree of risk. This includes a high risk of suicide as well as a risk of danger to other people. In addition, there is a risk of organic brain damage which may be irreversible. The risk of suicide is relevant in the context of the Clinical Programme for Self Harm Presentations to Emergency Departments and so there is a crossover between these two Clinical Programmes.

An integral part of the Dual Diagnosis Programme will be to devise a model of care that will ensure that all adolescents and adults suspected of having a moderate to severe mental illness coexisting with significant substance misuse have access to a timely mental health service nationally and this is to be delivered on a CHO basis. The service will be provided in an integrated manner across the Primary Care Division and the Mental Health Service and will ensure that there are close working relationships with the relevant specialties in the Acute Hospital Groups that would deal with any medical comorbidities that may occur, particularly in those with alcohol misuse.

220. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if a third paediatric consultant rheumatologist has been approved for Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin as part of the 2018 service plan in view of the waiting list and access issues for children with juvenile idiopathic arthritis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17010/18]

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 as soon as possible.

Medicinal Products

221. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health when the national biosimilars strategy will be published; the reason for the delay in publishing same; the measures the strategy will contain to increase Ireland's low uptake of biosimilars; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17095/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Medicines play a vital role in improving the overall health of Irish patients. Securing access to new and innovative medicines in a timely manner is a key objective of the Government of Ireland. However, the challenge is delivering on this objective in an affordable and sustainable way.

The Department and the HSE are engaging in a number of initiatives which will endeavour to lead to better access to medicines for patients, value for the taxpayer and the cost-effective provision of medicines in Ireland. To address some of these issues, the Government is developing a National Biosimilar Medicines Policy to promote the rational use of biosimilar medicines and to create a sustainable environment for biological medicines in Ireland.

A public consultation on a National Biosimilar Medicines Policy was undertaken by the Department of Health towards the end of last year. The responses to the consultation and other possible policy levers are being considered by the Department with a view to developing a National Biosimilar Medicines Policy.

The development of such a policy will require the involvement of stakeholders across the health system and this process is under way.

Hospitals Building Programme

222. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health when works will commence on the new hospital in Cork city promised in the National Development Plan 2018-2027; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17079/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Development Plan provides €10.9 billion to invest in infrastructure, equipment and additional service capacity for the public health sector.

The National Development Plan is a ten year plan which will provide the capital funding to develop dedicated ambulatory elective-only hospital facilities. We must ensure that we carefully plan the use of this capital funding so as to meet the populations health needs and achieve value for money.

As is to be expected with a ten year plan, many proposals, including an elective-only hospital in Cork, are at a very early stage and will require to progress through appraisal, planning, design and tender before a firm location, timeline or funding required can be established.

Home Help Service

223. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the reason Sligo, Leitrim and West Cavan LHO experienced a reduction of 26,713 home help hours in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17073/18]

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.

Psychological Services

224. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health the way in which he plans to alleviate the waiting list for child psychologists, particularly amongst persons under 15 years of age who make up 80% of the waiting list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8872/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In recognition of the particular need to address access to primary care-based counselling services for under 18s, the Government has prioritised investment in this area. The HSE's National Service Plan 2016 provided an additional €5 million for psychology for children with a focus on enhanced counselling interventions for children and adolescents. Recruitment of these posts, which includes a mix of psychologists and psychology assistants has commenced on a nationwide basis.

I have asked the HSE to revert to the Deputy in relation to the detailed service issues, including the number of children waiting for an appointment for psychology services.

Commencement of Legislation

225. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the distress that delaying Parts 2 and 3 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 has had on families in view of assurances that they would be commenced in the last quarter of 2017; if Parts 2 and 3 will be commenced as a matter of urgency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8828/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): A number of technical drafting issues have come to light in relation to Parts 2 & 3 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015. The implications of these issues are being explored by officials in my Department and the Office of the Attorney General and clarification on whether primary legislation is required to resolve these issues is being sought. In the event that primary legislation is required I would seek to deal with it as a matter of urgency.

Mental Health Services Staff

226. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health his views on consultant psychiatrist numbers of 8 per 100,000 and the fact that Ireland ranks behind all other northern European countries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17126/18]

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.

Mental Health Services Data

227. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in each CHO waiting for an appointment with a psychiatry of old age community team; and the number waiting 0 to 12, 12 to 26, 26 to 52 and more than 52 weeks, respectively. [17127/18]

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.

Mental Health Services Data

228. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in each CHO waiting for an appointment with a general adult community service mental health team; and the number waiting 0 to 12, 12 to 26, 26 to 52 and waiting more than 52 weeks respectively. [17128/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Applications

229. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a place in a care home for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17135/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Home Help Service Provision

230. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if additional home help services for a person (details supplied) will be sanctioned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17136/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

231. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the reason for excluding persons over 21 years of age with type 1 diabetes from accessing the FreeStyle Libre device; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17144/18]

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.

Home Help Service Appeals

232. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if reconsideration will be given to home help for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17146/18]

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.

Paediatric Services

233. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Health the measures he is taking to address the chronic shortage of paediatric rheumatologists in view of the fact that 900 children have been on waiting lists at Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin for over three years (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17149/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am aware that there are challenges in meeting the growing demand for rheumatology services, and that the Health Service Executive is working towards improving access to such services.

In relation to rheumatology service provision, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly as soon as possible.

Health Services Staff Recruitment

234. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of the appointment of a position (details supplied); the timeframe for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17151/18]

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

The particular issue raised by the Deputy is a service matter for the HSE. Accordingly I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Status

19 April 2018

235. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health if a surgery appointment for a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17161/18]

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.

Hospitals Funding

236. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the capital funding provided for Connolly Hospital in 2017; and the capital funding allocated for projects (details supplied) during 2017, in tabular form. [17167/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department has asked the Health Service Executive to provide you directly with the details requested in respect of capital funding at Connolly Hospital Blanchardstown during 2017.

Health Services Provision

237. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health if concerns raised by a person (details supplied) in regard to juvenile arthritis will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17174/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am aware that there are challenges in meeting the growing demand for rheumatology services, and that the Health Service Executive is working towards improving access to such services.

In relation to rheumatology service provision, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly as soon as possible.

Medical Card Applications

238. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if a discretionary medical card will be facilitated in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17178/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the

Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy.

Hospital Charges

239. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Health if the €80 charge imposed by certain hospital groups on persons with haemochromatosis requiring venesection will be removed as recommended by an association (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17180/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Act 1970 (as amended) provides that all people ordinarily resident in Ireland are entitled, subject to certain charges, to public in-patient hospital services including consultant services and to public out-patient hospital services. Under Section 52 of the Health Act 1970, as amended by Section 12 of the Health (Amendment) Act 2013, a person who has been referred to a hospital for an in-patient service, including that provided on a day case basis, will have to pay the statutory daily charge, currently €80 per day, up to a maximum of €800 per year. On this basis, where venesection is classed as a day case procedure and is not carried out in an out-patient setting, the public in-patient charge applies.

My Department is currently considering the issue of the application of the public in-patient charge of €80 for venesection in Acute Hospitals as well as broader issues in relation to the treatment of patients with Hereditary Haemochromatosis.

Ambulance Service

240. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health his plans to meet voluntary committees from Connemara that are concerned with the quality of the ambulance service in Connemara and that have requested a meeting with him, the director of the National Ambulance Service and the HSE; when the meeting will take place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17181/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Deputy may wish to note that I met with representatives of this Group last year to hear their concerns regarding ambulance response times in the Connemara area. Following that meeting, the National Ambulance Service (NAS) met with the Group on 26 September 2017 and since then has met with local elected representatives; the most recent meeting took place on 8 February last.

I wish to assure the Deputy that the NAS is committed to the provision of a safe patient focused pre-hospital emergency care services and will continue to engage with representative groups to improve services in the West.

Health Services Provision

241. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in the lodgment of a new planning application by a day care centre (details supplied) in County Kildare. [17190/18]

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.

Primary Medical Certificates Applications

242. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if a primary medical certificate will be issued to a person (details supplied). [17195/18]

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

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

Planning Issues

243. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Health the way in which the HSE will assess and monitor the risks to human health in view of the fact that An Bord Pleanála has approved a company's (details supplied) application for an incinerator at a location and in view of the levels of pulmonary mortality in Limerick city and county; the programme of action the HSE will take to measure and manage the increased health risks to the population in the vicinity of the planned incinerator; the provision that will be made for increased expenditure should County Limerick's position as the national blackspot for pulmonary mortality continue to deteriorate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17210/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): This is a matter for the HSE therefore I have referred the question to the HSE for attention and direct reply.

Health Services Staff Data

244. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of assaults on health care staff in hospitals across the State in each of the years 2008 to 2017, by number of assaults and the hospital in which the assault took place, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17212/18]

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

Hospital Staff Data

245. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of security staff, associated with an agency or directly employed, working in hospitals across the State in each of the years 2008 to 2017 by hospital, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17213/18]

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

Primary Care Centres Provision

246. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Health the status of the development of primary care centres in Croom, Newcastle West, Kilmallock, Caherconlish and Castletroy, County Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17216/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the HSE has responsibility for the provision, along with the maintenance and operation of Primary Care Centres and other Primary Care facilities, the Executive has been asked to reply directly to the Deputy.

Medicinal Products Availability

247. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if a reply will issue to a query made in correspondence (details supplied) regarding medicines for persons with multiple sclerosis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17221/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Officials in my Department have sought further clarification from the Deputy in relation to this parliamentary question.

Hospital Appointments Status

248. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied). [17228/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Disabilities Assessments

249. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an assessment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17239/18]

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

which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

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

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Applications

250. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the status of the application by a person (details supplied) for the fair deal scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17262/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Medicinal Products Availability

251. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health the differences in the way in which persons with MS here access life changing medicines by comparison to other EU countries; the reason there is delay for new medicine to be reimbursed here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17285/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for medicine pricing and reimbursement decisions, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. As Minister for Health, I do not have any statutory power or function in relation to the reimbursement of medicines. The Act specifies the criteria for decisions on the reimbursement of medicines.

In line with the 2013 Act, if a company would like a medicine to be reimbursed by the HSE pursuant to the Community Drugs scheme, the company must first submit an application to the HSE to have the new medicine added to the Reimbursement List.

As outlined in the IPHA agreement, and in line with the 2013 Act, the HSE will decide, within 180 days of receiving the application (or a longer period if further information is sought from the company), to either add the medicine to the reimbursement list or agree to reimburse it as a hospital medicine, or refuse to reimburse the medicine.

HSE decisions on which medicines are reimbursed by the taxpayer are made on objective, scientific and economic grounds, on the advice of the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE).

The NCPE conducts health technology assessments (HTAs) for the HSE, and makes recommendations on reimbursement to assist HSE decisions. The NCPE uses a decision framework to systematically assess whether a drug is cost-effective as a health intervention.

The HSE strives to reach a decision in as timely a manner as possible. However, because of the significant monies involved, it must ensure that the best price is achieved, as these commitments are often multi-million euro investments on an ongoing basis. This can lead to a protracted deliberation process.

I have been informed that Ocrelizumab for the treatment of adult patients with early primary

progressive multiple sclerosis (PPMS) and for the treatment of adult patients with relapsing forms of multiple sclerosis (RMS) is currently undergoing a full pharmacoeconomic assessment by the NCPE.

I am keen to engage with Industry and to explore ways in which new medicines might be more easily introduced in Ireland. However, any innovative approaches that may be tabled must be compatible with the statutory provisions which are in place and must also recognise the fundamental pricing/funding issues in the context of finite Exchequer resources.

Health and Social Care Professionals Regulation

252. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if he is satisfied that the regulation process relative to speech and language therapists trained abroad that now wish to have their qualifications registered here is efficient and fit for purpose; and the number of applications pending and dealt with, respectively in each of the past three years. [17290/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 seeks to protect the public by providing a system of statutory registration for designated health and social care professions, including that of Speech and Language Therapist.

Statutory regulation is a system underpinned by law whereby each member of a profession is recognised by a specified body as competent to practice within that profession. As a legally binding process, with a mechanism for the prosecution of offences, it ensures a robust system that serves the dual function of protecting the public while ensuring that the good reputation of a profession is not called into question by the poor practices of an individual member.

CORU is the umbrella term used to describe the Health and Social Care Professionals Council, its committees and the registration boards established under the Act to regulate each individual designated profession. Its function is to protect the public by promoting high standards of professional conduct, education, training and competence through the statutory registration of the designated health and social care professions. The recent decision to designate the professions of counsellors and psychotherapists under the Act will increase the number of regulated professions to 16 in total. CORU's register of speech and language therapists opened on 31 October 2014.

Professionals who apply for registration must demonstrate that they are fit and proper to practise in the profession, complete National Vetting Bureau e-vetting and international police clearance, verify that they agree to abide by their profession specific Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics, pay the application fee and hold an 'approved' qualification. To apply for registration, a professional must complete an online application form and provide all of the required supporting documentation.

An "approved qualification" is one that has been awarded on satisfactory completion of an education and training programme in the State approved by the relevant registration board; or a non-Irish qualification which has been deemed equivalent to the Irish qualification standard.

Such non-Irish qualifications are assessed under the mechanisms set out in Directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications which provide for the assessment of an applicant's formal training and post-qualification professional experience to determine if they meet the standard required to practise in the home member state (i.e. Ireland). The same mechanism for recognition is also used by CORU Registration Boards for the assessment of non-Irish qualifications which are outside the scope of the Directive (i.e. all non EEA qualifications and the qualifications of non-EEA nationals).

This recognition process set out in the Directive requires the submission and assessment of documentation demonstrating each individual applicant's formal training and post-qualification professional experience, and provides for the issuing of decisions within four months of the submission of a complete application.

I am satisfied that these processes of registration and qualification recognition provide a strong mechanism to protect the public by ensuring that only appropriately qualified professionals are registered and accordingly it is fit for purpose. I appreciate that the qualification recognition process may take time; however, the four month timeframe contained in the EU Directive is reasonable given the nature of the assessment required.

The numbers of applications received and completed for registration in the speech and language therapists register from 2014 to 2018 are as follows:

Year	Applications received -Total 1,896	Registrations completed - Total 1,823
2014	27	3
2015	258	149
2016	1,375	737
2017	199	881
2018	37	53

Cancer Screening Programmes

253. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the reason the BreastCheck western unit is to withdraw its mobile unit from Sligo town and relocate to the village of Collooney; his views on whether this will result in access problems to the service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17335/18]

254. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if BreastCheck will be engaging with Sligo County Council to facilitate the locating of the BreastCheck mobile unit in Sligo town; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17336/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 253 and 254 together.

The HSE's National Screening Service (NSS) advises that the BreastCheck programme seeks to source suitable sites for mobile screening units in order to maximise take-up of screening opportunities and to ensure that locations meet the highest standards for women.

BreastCheck is currently providing screening to women in Co. Sligo with a mobile unit in Tubbercurry. A second mobile unit was located in Sligo town in the past, but BreastCheck were informed that the location used for this service is no longer being made available. BreastCheck identified an alternative site in Collooney and screening is scheduled to commence there in a number of weeks.

BreastCheck continues to engage with Sligo County Council and other potential partners with a view to securing a site within Sligo town. In recent days BreastCheck has been offered some potential locations in the town and is currently following up on these to determine suitability. If the process to identify a suitable location in Sligo town is successful, BreastCheck will ensure that services are provided there at the earliest possible time.

Hospital Appointments Administration

255. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person (details supplied) will be scheduled. [17337/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Medicinal Products Availability

256. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if he will engage with an organisation (details supplied) and the pharmaceutical industry to ensure new medicines are available to persons with MS; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17338/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for medicine pricing and reimbursement decisions, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. As Minister for Health, I do not have any statutory power or function in relation to the reimbursement of medicines. The Act specifies the criteria for decisions on the reimbursement of medicines.

In line with the 2013 Act, if a company would like a medicine to be reimbursed by the HSE pursuant to the Community Drugs scheme, the company must first submit an application to the HSE to have the new medicine added to the Reimbursement List.

As outlined in the IPHA agreement, and in line with the 2013 Act, the HSE will decide, within 180 days of receiving the application (or a longer period if further information is sought from the company), to either add the medicine to the reimbursement list or agree to reimburse it as a hospital medicine, or refuse to reimburse the medicine.

HSE decisions on which medicines are reimbursed by the taxpayer are made on objective, scientific and economic grounds, on the advice of the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE).

The NCPE conducts health technology assessments (HTAs) for the HSE, and makes recommendations on reimbursement to assist HSE decisions. The NCPE uses a decision framework to systematically assess whether a drug is cost-effective as a health intervention.

The HSE strives to reach a decision in as timely a manner as possible. However, because of the significant monies involved, it must ensure that the best price is achieved, as these commitments are often multi-million euro investments on an ongoing basis. This can lead to a

protracted deliberation process.

I am keen to engage with Industry and to explore ways in which new medicines might be more easily introduced in Ireland. However, any innovative approaches that may be tabled must be compatible with the statutory provisions which are in place and must also recognise the fundamental pricing/funding issues in the context of finite Exchequer resources.

I have indicated willingness to meet with MS Ireland and my office is in contact with the organisation to arrange a mutually convenient date.

General Practitioner Contracts

257. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 288 of 29 March 2018, when discussions will commence with general practitioner representatives on contractual issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17347/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Officials from the Department of Health have been working with their counterparts in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the HSE to ensure that the planned engagement with general practitioner representatives is fully focused on the priorities of the Government's health reform agenda and measures to better address the strategic challenges facing the service.

There is no confirmed date at this point in time for the commencement of the consultations. However, the process is expected to start in the coming weeks.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

258. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health his views on the fact that in 2018 it was announced that Pembrolizumab would be licensed in April 2018 for NSCLC patients however his Department and the HSE attached a narrow window of eligibility as it is a requirement that the tumour has a PD-L1 expression of over 50%; if this requirement can be reduced to bring it in line with similar drugs such as Nivolumab; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17350/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for medicine pricing and reimbursement decisions, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. As Minister for Health, I do not have any statutory power or function in relation to the reimbursement of medicines. The Act specifies the criteria for decisions on the reimbursement of medicines.

In line with the 2013 Act, if a company would like a medicine to be reimbursed by the HSE pursuant to the Community Drugs scheme, the company must first submit an application to the HSE to have the new medicine added to the Reimbursement List.

As outlined in the IPHA agreement, and in line with the 2013 Act, the HSE will decide, within 180 days of receiving the application (or a longer period if further information is sought from the company), to either add the medicine to the reimbursement list or agree to reimburse it as a hospital medicine, or refuse to reimburse the medicine.

HSE decisions on which medicines are reimbursed by the taxpayer are made on objective, scientific and economic grounds, on the advice of the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE).

The NCPE conducts health technology assessments (HTAs) for the HSE, and makes recommendations on reimbursement to assist HSE decisions. The NCPE uses a decision framework to systematically assess whether a drug is cost-effective as a health intervention.

The HSE strives to reach a decision in as timely a manner as possible. However, because of the significant monies involved, it must ensure that the best price is achieved, as these commitments are often multi-million euro investments on an on-going basis. This can lead to a protracted deliberation process.

Pembrolizumab is reimbursed for the following indications:

- KEYTRUDA as monotherapy is indicated for the treatment of advanced (unresectable or metastatic) melanoma in adults.

- KEYTRUDA as monotherapy is indicated for the first-line treatment of metastatic non-small cell lung carcinoma (NSCLC) in adults whose tumours express PD-L1 with a $\geq 50\%$ tumour proportion score (TPS) with no EGFR or ALK positive tumour mutations.

I have been informed by the HSE that they are currently assessing the following indication for reimbursement:

- KEYTRUDA as monotherapy is indicated for the treatment of locally advanced or metastatic NSCLC in adults whose tumours express PD-L1 with a $\geq 1\%$ TPS and who have received at least one prior chemotherapy regimen. Patients with EGFR or ALK positive tumour mutations should also have received targeted therapy before receiving KEYTRUDA.

The NCPE is currently conducting their HTA on this indication and the HSE will evaluate this application for reimbursement in line with the 2013 Act.

Emergency Departments

259. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the most effective and immediate action that can be taken to alleviate overcrowding in emergency departments nationally; if an analysis has been carried out with a view to identifying the capacity and demand at all accident and emergency units; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17351/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Against a background of growing demand for unscheduled care and high acute hospital occupancy rates, Government provided €30 million in 2017 and a further €40 million in 2018 for measures to increase acute hospital capacity and alleviate overcrowding in Emergency Departments. Almost 50% of this funding was used to deliver home support packages and transitional care beds to reduce the incidence of delayed discharges. Furthermore, over 200 beds have been opened this winter and more beds are due to come on stream later in the year.

Notwithstanding the increased level of resources provided, this winter has been particularly difficult for our health services with ED attendances up 3.7% and admissions up 3.3% during the first quarter of the year, as compared to the same period in 2017.

The situation was further exacerbated by Storm Emma and the severe weather that followed. In response to this, I approved a further €5m in emergency funding to provide additional home support packages and transitional care beds to assist the safe discharge of patients who required support to return home following the adverse weather.

In the light of the conclusions of the Health Service Capacity Review that the system will

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need nearly 2,600 additional acute hospital beds by 2031, I have asked my Department to work with the HSE to identify the location and mix of beds across the hospital system which can be opened and staffed this year and into 2019 in order to improve preparedness for Winter 2018/2019.

As outlined in the Capacity Review, the demographic pressures being experienced by the health service are such as to demand not just additional capacity but continued emphasis on health and wellbeing initiatives, an improved model of care with a stronger role for enhanced community based services and continued improvement in productivity including in acute hospitals. The Government has approved a record level of capital investment in health at €10.9 billion over the next ten years. This will provide for a major enhancement of the capacity of our health services to meet demand. Importantly, the accelerated introduction of additional capacity for 2018/2019 will be matched by forthcoming reforms including the publication of a detailed Sláintecare Implementation Plan and the overhaul of the current GP contract.

Finally, a review of the Winter Initiative 2017/2018 is being undertaken, which will inform a 3 year plan for unscheduled care, as well as supporting the provision of additional capacity in Winter 2018/19.

Mental Health Services Data

260. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which speech and language therapy and mental health support exists for children in all areas throughout the country; if particular shortfalls have been identified and are being addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17352/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

Health Services Reform

261. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when a restructuring of the HSE will take place with a view to greater accountability and influence at regional level including representational status for professionals and public representatives; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17353/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Committee on the Future of Healthcare published its report, Sláintecare, last year. This report makes a number of recommendations in relation to improving governance and accountability in the health service, including the establishment of a governing board for the HSE and the establishment of regional bodies to support the delivery of integrated care.

As the Deputy is aware, a range of actions are already being taken in response to the Sláintecare report. Work is at an advanced stage in my Department in developing a Sláintecare Implementation Plan. The plan will translate the Sláintecare Report into a detailed programme of reform over the next 10 years, with a focus on the immediate years ahead. I have already signalled my support for the Committee's recommendations in relation to governance and accountability and these will form an integral component of the Implementation Plan. I expect to bring this Plan to Government shortly.

The Government has also agreed to the establishment of a governing board for the HSE. Preparatory work is underway and I will bring a Memorandum to Government with a draft General Scheme of a Bill in the coming weeks. My Department has also recently opened a public consultation regarding the geo-alignment of Hospital Groups and Community Healthcare Organisations. These actions are important elements of overall proposals in relation to governance and accountability in the health service.

Transport Support Scheme

262. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the progress to date in determining the appropriate scheme to replace the mobility allowance and motorised transport grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17354/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Deputy will be familiar with the background to the closure of both the Mobility Allowance and Motorised Transport Grant schemes in February 2013. Since the closure of the Mobility Allowance, the Government has directed that the Health Service Executive should continue to pay an equivalent monthly payment of up to €208.50 per month to the 4,133 people in receipt of the Mobility Allowance, on an interim basis, pending the establishment of a new Transport Support Scheme.

The Government decided that the detailed preparatory work required for a new Transport Support Scheme and associated statutory provisions should be progressed by the Minister for Health. The Programme for a Partnership Government acknowledges the ongoing drafting of primary legislation for a new Transport Support Scheme to assist those with a disability to meet their mobility costs. The Health (Transport Support) Bill is on the list of priority legislation for publication in the Spring/Summer session 2018. I can confirm that work on the policy proposals for the new Scheme is at an advanced stage. The proposals seek to ensure that:

- There is a firm statutory basis to the Scheme's operation;
- There is transparency and equity in the eligibility criteria attaching to the Scheme;
- Resources are targeted at those with greatest needs; and
- The Scheme is capable of being costed and is affordable on its introduction and on an ongoing basis.

It is hoped to bring a General Scheme and Heads of Bill to Government shortly, seeking Government approval to the drafting of the Bill for the new Transport Support Payment.

With regard to the Motorised Transport Grant, this scheme operated as a means-tested grant to assist persons with severe disabilities with the purchase or adaptation of a car, where that car was essential to retain employment. The maximum Motorised Transport Grant, which was payable once in any three-year period, was €5,020. Following closure of the scheme in February 2013, no further Motorised Transport Grants have been payable.

It is important to note that the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers scheme operated by the Revenue Commissioners, remains in place. This scheme provides VRT and VAT relief, an exemption from road tax and a fuel grant to drivers and passengers with a disability, who qualify under the relevant criteria set out in governing regulations made by the Minister for Finance. Specifically adapted vehicles driven by disabled persons are also exempt from payment of tolls on national toll roads and toll bridges. Transport Infrastructure Ireland has responsibility for this particular Scheme.

There are improvements in access to a range of transport support schemes available to persons with disabilities in the State and on-going work is being carried out by Government Departments, agencies and transport providers to further improve access to public transport services. Under the National Disability Inclusion Strategy, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport has responsibility for the continued development of accessibility and availability of public transport for people with a disability.

Health Services Staff Data

263. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the staffing levels throughout the public health sector at all levels in hospitals and community care; the extent to which they have been augmented in recent years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17355/18]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

264. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if the National Treatment Purchase Fund can be utilised to alleviate waiting lists at public hospitals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17356/18]

265. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which he is monitoring the waiting lists throughout the health service with particular reference to specific procedures such as miscellaneous orthopaedic, cardiac, neurological or other procedures; if the utilisation of the treatment purchase scheme can be used to clear backlogs to facilitate efficiencies throughout the service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17357/18]

268. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which the treatment purchase scheme is being used to address issues of delays experienced by persons awaiting various procedures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17360/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 264, 265 and 268 together.

The National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) has a statutory role to collect, collate and validate information in relation to persons waiting for hospital treatment and to put in place information systems and procedures for that purpose.

The NTPF is under the governance (aegis) of the Department of Health and my Department has a governance structure in place which involves regular governance and monitoring meetings with both the NTPF and HSE, including at Ministerial level.

The Inpatient/Day Case Action Plan, published on 12 April, is a joint initiative between the HSE, the NTPF and my Department and sets the projected activity and impact that will be delivered in 2018 from within the allocated funding. As outlined in the Action Plan, a projected 1.16 million inpatient and day case procedures will take place in 2018, with NTPF activity accounting for 20,000 procedures and HSE activity 1.14 million procedures.

The NTPF procures capacity for each of the procedures identified in the Action Plan in both private hospitals or public hospitals. The NTPF will target seven procedures which account for

40% of people on the Active Inpatient Day Case waiting list:

Cataracts, Hip/Knee replacements, Varicose Veins, Tonsillectomies, Cystoscopies, Coronary Angiograms, and Excision of Lesions, amounting to 13,800 procedures, as well as 5,000 procedures across an expanded range of over 40 other procedures, and 4,000 GI Scopes.

The Action Plan strikes the appropriate balance between maximising the number of patients treated in both public and private capacity, as appropriate, and ensuring the best return for the taxpayer.

The overall number of patients waiting for an inpatient or day case procedure is projected to fall to below 70,000 by year end, from a peak of 86,100 in July 2017. My ambition is to build upon this progress in 2019 and to further reduce waiting times for Irish patients.

General Practitioner Data

266. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the number of general practitioners practising here; the extent to which this number has fluctuated in the past ten years; the extent to which demographic trends are affecting requirements in this area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17358/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): General Practitioners play an important role in the primary care system. The number of General Practitioners on the specialist register continues to increase – up from 2,270 in 2010 to 3,637 at the end of 2017 and the number of GPs contracted by the HSE under the GMS scheme has also risen from 2,098 in 2008 to 2,485 as of 1 April 2018.

The 2018 Health Service Capacity Review proposes a number of estimates of between 4,790 and 4,970 General Practitioners that may be required by 2031. While it is important to note that these estimates are based on statistical models of demand and are subject to certain assumptions, the Government is aware of the manpower issues facing general practice and has taken steps to increase the numbers of General Practice training places accordingly.

In 2009, there were 120 General Practice training places available and this year it is expected that over 190 training places will be filled, an increase of around 60% over a nine year period. The number of training places will rise to 259 in coming years. There were over 400 applications for the 2018 training programme which is a significant increase of almost 50% on the number of applications from 2017.

The Government is also committed to engaging with General Practitioner representatives on necessary service improvements and contractual reforms to the current GMS contract. This process is expected to commence in the coming weeks. The primary focus of the consultations will be on a package of measures and reforms which, if agreed, will result in an expansion in the scope of the service provided by General Practitioners to holders of medical and visit cards.

There is potential for State expenditure on General Practitioner services to increase significantly in coming years if the talks are successful. However, any revision of fees is contingent upon health contractors agreeing to the delivery of necessary service improvements and contractual reforms in line with the Government's priorities for the health service.

Medicinal Products Prices

267. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if particular medicines are to be included in the discussions to reduce the cost with particular reference to innovative medicines and or generic medicines; if legislative changes are planned in this context; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17359/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Officials in my Department have sought further clarification from the Deputy in relation to this PQ.

Question No. 268 answered with Question No. 264.

Medical Card Applications

269. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the progress to date in the determination of a medical card renewal in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17361/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Status

270. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when a hospital appointment will be facilitated in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17369/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Hospital Waiting Lists

271. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which provision is being made to identify persons on long waiting lists for various treatment, with particular reference to those with the most urgent requirement with a view to expediting the process in order to avail of every opportunity to reduce such waiting lists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17384/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Programme for Government commits

to reducing waiting times for procedures in hospitals and to increase funding to the National Treatment Purchase Fund to deliver on this commitment. In the Budget and Estimates 2018, funding for the NTPF to treat public patients was increased to €50 million.

The Inpatient/Day Case Action Plan is a joint initiative between the HSE, the NTPF and my Department and sets the projected activity and impact that will be delivered in 2018 from within the allocated funding. As outlined in the Action Plan, a projected 1.16 million inpatient and day case procedures will take place in 2018, with NTPF activity accounting for 20,000 procedures and HSE activity 1.14 million procedures.

The overall number of patients waiting for an inpatient or day case procedure is projected to fall to below 70,000 by year end, from a peak of 86,100 in July 2017.

As part of the plan, all patients who are waiting more than 9 months for a cataract, hip and/or knee replacement, tonsils, Gastro Intestinal scope or one of four other high-volume treatments will be offered treatment in 2018 if clinically suitable. Therefore it is planned that the number of patients waiting longer than 9 months will fall by 10,000 by year end.

My ambition is to build upon this progress in 2019 and to further reduce waiting time for Irish patients.

HSE Funding

272. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which he remains satisfied regarding the adequacy of the health budget to meet the requirements in their entirety throughout 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17385/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The 2018 National Service Plan set out a budget of over €14.5 billion for the HSE, the highest budget ever allocated. The Health budget was increased by over €600 million on 2017, a substantial additional level of funding. The amount allocated follows an extensive process of engagement between my Department and the HSE, which considers both the funding requirements as submitted by the HSE and the fiscal position. These types of engagements are a normal part of the Budgetary process and happen with agencies across Government. All public bodies put forward spending proposals but all such bodies, including the HSE, are required to operate within the amounts proposed by Government and determined by the Dáil. While increased resources contribute to health service improvement, there are also ways in which improvements can be achieved within the current resources. The HSE has my full support in achieving these improvements as part of our shared reform agenda.

Since I have come to office the allocation to the HSE has increased by €1.4 billion or 10.6%. More resources are always welcome in contributing to the development of services but there is also a responsibility on the HSE to seek greater value from the very substantial existing resources at its disposal.

The services to be provided in 2018 are as set out in the National Service Plan, and levels are typically equal to or higher than planned or delivered in 2017. The additional funding provided in Budget 2018 for new developments will support new or expanded levels of services across priority service areas. I expect the HSE to operate within the funding provided to it in 2018.

The HSE notes that provision of the level of services and activities set out in the plan will require the delivery of value improvements totalling €346m. The Value Improvement Programme has three strands; a Mitigation Programme, a Corporate Value programme and a Stra-

tegic Value and Productivity programme. The HSE will lead on both the Mitigation programme and the Corporate Value programme. The Mitigation Programme is focused on cost reductions and savings at service level and includes procurement savings and agency conversion. In the Corporate Value programme, the HSE will identify savings and cost reductions across their entire corporate operations. This might include better control of central administrative costs such as travel and better management of supplies.

The Department of Health will work with the HSE within a shared governance and oversight framework on the Strategic Value and Productivity programme. This will be a multi-year strategic initiative, with the objective of identifying and implementing savings from improved productivity and changes in models of care or policies.

Health Services Staff Recruitment

273. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Health the extent to which the number of nurses, doctors and consultants becoming available in 2018 is sufficient to meet the demand; his views on whether it is possible to compete with health services in the Middle East in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17386/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The need to increase the numbers of consultants, medical staff, nurses and midwives in the public health service is a priority for this Government. It has been the focus of attention since 2014 as additional resources have become available and will continue to be this year and in the years ahead. The capacity challenges across acute, primary and social care that we must prepare for, and address, have been highlighted in the recently published Capacity Review.

It is recognised that retention of doctors and nurses is critical to the future growth of the medical and nursing workforce. Some progress has been made.

The number of consultants has increased by 109 in the 12 months ending December 2017 to 2,971 whole time equivalents, and by 415 in the 4 years since December 2013. The number of NCHDS has increased by 270 in the 12 months ending December, 2017 to 6,331 whole time equivalents, and by 1,323 in the 4 years since December 2013.

In July 2013 a Working Group, chaired by Professor Brian MacCraith, President, Dublin City University, was established to carry out a strategic review of medical training and career structure. The Group made 25 recommendations relating to training and career pathways for doctors with a focus on improving graduate retention in the public health system and planning for future service needs. Initiatives taken on foot of the Group's recommendations include the launch of a careers and training website, which gives information about each specialty, including details of training pathways and training duration, increasing the number of family-friendly training places and the appointment of lead NCHDs across sites.

With regard to nursing, the number of nurses and midwives has increased by 942 in the 12 months ending December 2017 to 36,777 whole time equivalents and by 2,599 in the 4 years since December 2013. This growth reflects the implementation of a Nursing Recruitment and Retention Agreement concluded with the INMO and SIPTU Nursing last year. This committed the HSE to increasing the number of nurses and midwives by 1,224 additional permanent posts across the health service in 2017. The HSE remain committed to the Agreement and efforts will continue to fill the remaining posts. Funded workforce plans for 2018 are in the process of being developed. One of the commitments already made by the HSE and supported by this Department is ensuring that every nursing graduate is offered a permanent contract in 2018 and

work is already underway in that regard. Additional student places have also been put in place as part of the agreement and this will ensure growing numbers of graduates in the years ahead.

The Government is acutely aware that there is a backdrop of global shortages in health professionals and that there is intense competition from health services in the Middle East and elsewhere. This is particularly so given that Irish medical and nursing graduates are held in high regard worldwide. We must ensure that when our graduates qualify that Ireland is an attractive option for them this autumn and in the years ahead.

Orthodontic Services Waiting Lists

274. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which waiting lists for orthodontic treatment have been reduced for children at primary and second level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17387/18]

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

Sheep Welfare Scheme

275. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the balancing payment of the 2017 sheep welfare scheme will issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17152/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In December 2016 I introduced the Sheep Welfare Scheme to contribute to the continuing viability and sustainability of the sheep sector in Ireland. The Scheme is funded through the Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014 - 2020.

Advance payments in the amount of €16 million under the first year of the Sheep Welfare Scheme have already issued. Balancing payments in respect of these applications are due to commence shortly.

Monitoring of Food Safety Standards

276. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the way in which his Department will assess the risks to the food chain, consumer health and the value and reputation of Irish agricultural exports in view of the fact that An Bord Pleanála has approved a company's (details supplied) application for an incinerator at a location; the way in which his Department and the Food Safety Authority will measure the effects on food safety caused by the incineration of toxic waste in the Golden Vale; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17211/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Ensuring the highest standards of food safety, consumer protection, animal and plant health is a key function of my Department. An integral element of this responsibility is the implementation of the national control plan whose primary objective is to ensure that feed and food is safe. This multi-annual national control plan (MANCP), is produced in conjunction with the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI), and contains details of the control systems in place for food, feed, animal health, animal welfare and plant health. While these control systems are implemented

by a number of Departments and agencies, the FSAI - which comes under the remit of the Department of Health - is the competent authority with overall responsibility for the enforcement of food legislation. This responsibility is managed through contractual arrangements with the relevant agencies, including my Department.

Veterinary Inspection Service Staff

277. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the way in which his Department fills vacancies that arise from a panel (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17219/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Veterinary Inspectors are recruited by my Department through a competitive process through the Public Appointments Service, the most recent recruitment campaign being that conducted in 2017.

My Department regularly assesses its Business needs and makes appointments from panels as prioritised vacancies arise. Occasionally, due to business demands, a Veterinary Inspector post in a Meat plant may require temporary cover in cases where permanent staff are unavailable for short periods of time. In these cases, the posts are filled on a temporary basis with suitably qualified people until the permanent staff resume duties.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Applications

278. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a decision has been made on a late area of natural constraints application appeal by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17236/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An application for the Basic Payment Scheme and Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) scheme was received from the person named on 14 July 2017. As this was a late application it incurred a late application penalty.

The person named submitted an appeal in relation to the late application penalty, and this appeal was upheld. Accordingly, payment under the ANC Scheme will issue shortly to the nominated bank account of the person named.

Young Farmers Scheme Eligibility

279. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if persons (details supplied) in County Kerry are eligible under the young farmers scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17256/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The persons named were successful applicants under the 2017 Young Farmers Scheme and received payment in December 2017. As they both commenced farming in 2013 they are also eligible to apply for continued participation in the Young Farmers Scheme in 2018.

Animal Welfare

280. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the mobile plunge dipping of sheep (details supplied) is recognised here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17261/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Sheep Welfare Scheme requires participants to undertake and complete two measurable and verifiable Sheep Welfare actions. Applicants must choose these actions from a menu of actions provided for under the scheme.

One of the actions which may be selected by a participant with lowland flocks is the prevention of flies (flystrike control). Under this action participants must incorporate a flystrike programme for the prevention of flies during the months of flystrike and this must incorporate a mechanical means for the prevention of flies. This mechanical means is in addition to any chemical control that may be used by the participant.

The practice of plunge dipping, either by means of a fixed handling and dipping facility, or by means of a mobile dipping unit, is a recognised process in the overall management of a sheep flock. Plunge dipping is considered to be a chemical control for the purposes of the Sheep Welfare Scheme and participants would be required to also have in place a mechanical means for the prevention of flies in order to satisfy their obligations under the scheme.

Any chemical treatment for the control of flystrike must be recorded. Records must then be retained and made available for inspection if required.

Beef Exports

281. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the timeframe for finalising a veterinary health certificate with the general administration of quality, supervision and quarantine, AQSIQ, for Irish beef access to China; when an inspection visit by the Chinese certification and accreditation administration to approve individual processing plants for export will take place in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17267/18]

282. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the progress made on receiving access for Irish meat products such as beef, lamb and pig-meat to China; the remaining stages in the approval process outstanding; and the approximate timetable for all stages to be completed and full access granted. [17268/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 281 and 282 together.

I was delighted to announce the opening of the Chinese beef market earlier this week. The first three beef plants were approved and listed on CNCA's website on Monday, April 16th. A further five plants are in the final stages of approval. This approval is a huge achievement for my Department. Getting to this stage has involved a huge joined-up effort across Government, my Department and State agencies, with strong engagement with the Chinese authorities on meeting their detailed requirements.

My Department has, in conjunction with industry, been working for some time towards ensuring that trade with China can commence and run smoothly. There remain a number of technical requirements which must be satisfied before beef trade can commence. It is expected that these requirements will take a number of weeks to complete. In addition, the approved plants will have to deal with their own technicalities including testing requirements. However,

I expect that the trade will commence this summer.

Ireland has already had access to the Chinese market for pigmeat for more than 10 years. Trade has increased considerably from 2,440 tonnes in 2010 to around 65,000 tonnes in 2017 with the value of these exports increasing from around €2 million to over €100 million over the same period. China is now the second largest destination for our pigmeat exports after the United Kingdom.

In relation to sheepmeat access a detailed questionnaire was submitted to AQSIQ in 2014. However, AQSIQ policy meant that the Chinese authorities would only consider market access for one species at a time. Now that the process for beef market access is coming to a close, my Department hopes to be in a position to renew negotiations towards sheepmeat market access.

Farm Data

283. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the average age of a farmer in Ireland; the average EU age in this regard; and the number of farmers by age group (details supplied) in tabular form. [17269/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The CSO's 2013 Farm Structures Survey indicated that approximately 37,700 (27%) of Irish farmers are aged over 65 years and 8,200 (6%) are aged under 35 years. The full age breakdown as published by the CSO is:

2013	Number of Farmers	%
< 35	8,200	6%
35 - 44	22,800	16%
45 - 54	34,800	25%
55 - 64	35,600	26%
> 65	37,700	27%
Total	139,100	100%

Source: Farm Structures Survey, 2013, CSO.

Eurostat data for 2013 showed that 31% of all EU farm holders were aged over 65 years and 6% are aged under 35 years. The full age breakdown as published by Eurostat is:

2013	Number of Farm Managers	%
< 35	651,540	6%
35 - 44	1,652,510	15%
45 - 54	2,486,970	23%
55 - 64	2,681,560	25%
> 65	3,365,690	31%
Total	10,838,270	100%

Source: Eurostat

GLAS Issues

284. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons in receipt of GLAS 1, 2 and 3 that have received the 2017 balanc-

ing payment by county in tabular form; the number of persons that have passed all payment approval checks and are awaiting the 2017 balancing payment; the number of GLAS recipients that have yet to receive the 2017 balancing payment by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17270/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Balancing Payments for the GLAS scheme can only commence when the Member State has verified that all eligibility conditions have been met. This is a requirement in the relevant EU Payment Regulations and is a long-standing EU audit requirement.

DAFM is currently under-taking the required level of inspections required to facilitate the balancing payments and is working to have this completed by mid-May. It is anticipated that GLAS balancing payments will then commence in mid-May.

I would encourage any GLAS applicant with outstanding obligations, such as the submission of a Nutrient Management Plan or a Commonage Management Plan to speak to their advisor and ensure that this work is completed as a priority. Without the submission of all the required information, these applicants will be ineligible for their balancing payment.

Sheep Welfare Scheme Data

285. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons in receipt of the sheep welfare scheme payment that have received the 2017 balancing payment by county in tabular form; the number of persons that have passed all payment approval checks and are awaiting the 2017 balancing payment; the number of sheep welfare recipients that have yet to receive the 2017 balancing payment by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17271/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As balancing payments under the Sheep Welfare Scheme have not yet commenced, the information requested by the Deputy is not yet available.

Balancing payments are due to commence shortly and the information requested will be forwarded to the Deputy directly as soon as payments are finalised and the information is available.

Farm Data

286. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of approved persons that have applied to the knowledge transfer group scheme in the beef, sheep, dairy, tillage, equine and poultry sectors; the targeted number of groups formed; the number of groups finalised to date; the number of payments that have issued to each sector in each year of the rural development programme, RDP, to date; the budget allocation for the knowledge transfer group scheme under the 2014-2020 RDP; the amount expended to date in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17272/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The statistics requested in this Parliamentary Question are currently being compiled and will be forwarded shortly.

Horticulture Sector

287. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding the reopening of the horticulture investment scheme; the amount of funding allocated; and the anticipated number of participants that will sign up. [17273/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I recognise the very severe impact that storm Emma has had on the Horticultural sector, in particular on soft fruit and amenity plant producers.

As an exceptional measure in response to the storm, Minister of State with responsibility for the Horticulture sector, Andrew Doyle, TD and I directed officials to re-open the 2018 Scheme of Investment Aid for the Development of the Commercial Horticulture Sector. This competitive grant aid scheme supports capital investments in specialised horticultural equipment and buildings that contribute to at least one of the scheme's four objectives namely to: improve the quality of output, facilitate environmentally friendly practices, improve working conditions and promote diversification of production. The grant aid covers all areas of the horticultural industry; field vegetables, mushrooms, protected crops, nursery crops, soft fruit/apples, cut foliage, Christmas trees, bulbs and bee-keeping.

The re-opening of this scheme is targeted towards the soft fruit and amenity plant sectors in particular and approvals will be limited to growers that are proposing investments in response to damage caused by Storm Emma. This targeted measure will give these growers a window of opportunity to apply for grant aid to assist their business to recover from the effects of the storm. €0.5 million has been identified for this purpose.

I believe the ability of the Scheme of Investment Aid for the Development of the Commercial Horticulture Sector to react to evolving situations is a key strength in supporting Ireland's highly dynamic horticulture sector. In 2017, just over €4.8 million was paid out supporting investment in excess of €12 million across the horticultural sector to include the soft fruit sector. The targeted re-opening of the Scheme is effective immediately, and the closing date for applications is Friday 27th April.

Fodder Crisis

288. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of participants in the fodder transport scheme to date by county in tabular form. [17274/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): To date a total of 45 applications have been received under the Fodder Transport Support Measure 2018.

The county breakdown of applications is -

County	Number of Applications
Clare	16
Donegal	12
Galway	1
Leitrim	1
Longford	1
Mayo	3

County	Number of Applications
Roscommon	8
Sligo	2
Tipperary	1
TOTAL	45

EU Directives

289. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the draft EU Directive COM(2018) 173; and if his Department has carried out an analysis of the proposal. [17275/18]

290. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on strengthening provisions at EU Council level in view of the fact that the draft EU Directive COM(2018) 173 applies to only SME suppliers; and his further views on whether a more encompassing approach to combatting unfair trading practices needs to be applicable to all groups in the food supply chain regardless of their size. [17276/18]

291. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on Article 4 with respect to the draft EU Directive COM(2018) 173 final that each member state shall designate a public authority to enforce the prohibitions laid down in Article 3 at national level which would have the power to issue fines for breaches of the new regulations; and his plans in this regard here in relation to an existing or new State body. [17277/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 289 to 291, inclusive, together.

I welcome the publication of the proposal for a Directive on Unfair Trading Practices (UTPs) in business to business relationships in the food supply chain. The Commission proposal seeks to protect the weakest links in the supply chain, farmers and small and medium sized food companies. The ambition is not to cover all UTPs but to address unfair UTPs which have a clear negative impact on the food supply chain. These include establishing a minimum standard of protection across the EU, including the banning of late payments for perishable food products (maximum of 30 days), last minute order cancellations for perishable food, unilateral or retro-active changes to contracts and forcing the supplier to pay for wasted product. Other measures are only permitted if agreed in advance by both parties including, for example, the return of unsold food products to a supplier and so called ‘hello’ money.

The Commission proposal was first discussed at the Agriculture Council this week (16 April), with a positive reaction from most Member States. I welcomed the publication of the proposal, and outlined my preliminary views on the matter:

It is clear the issue of unfair trading practices is a crucial issue for the agri-food sector as a whole. The relative bargaining power of operators along the supply chain is a matter of concern for many farmers and SMEs. Indeed some of our industry representatives have indicated, it is an issue for larger companies and cooperatives as well.

Up to 20 Member States have specific unfair trading practice rules. Ireland is among those Member States. However, as a nation that exports more than 80% of its agri food output, Ireland favours a regulatory framework at EU level. We believe that some commonality in the

framework would contribute to the more effective functioning of the single market.

On the other hand, many Member States have done very good work in this area in recent years. It seems clear that these Member States would prefer that any common minimum unfair trading practice standard introduced across the EU should complement existing national measures and not compete with them.

My officials are analysing the detail of the proposed directive from an agriculture and food perspective, in coordination with stakeholders and particularly with the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, which has lead responsibility for the Grocery Goods Regulations introduced in 2016. These regulations aim to ensure that commercial dealings in the grocery sector are fair, sustainable and operate in the interests of jobs, consumers and sustainable safe food.

Following on from that consultation process, I look forward to engaging constructively with the Commission, the Parliament, the Presidency and the Council on this significant issue in the coming months.

Environmental Schemes

292. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the schemes and initiatives in place to reduce ammonia and nitrogen emissions. [17279/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): There is a whole of Government approach to climate policy with officials from my Department working very closely with other Departments and in particular with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, which leads in this area.

In terms of ammonia, Ireland must comply with the National Emissions Ceilings Directive (NECD) under which ammonia emissions must be reduced by 1% below 2005 levels by 2020 and 5% below 2005 levels from 2030 onwards.

Notwithstanding our commitment to meeting the Directive, reducing ammonia and nitrogen emissions in Ireland represents a considerable challenge. Agricultural ammonia emissions reached a peak in 1998 and declined to a low in 2011, due to a decline in the ruminant livestock population and reduced use of fertiliser nitrogen. However, since then with the anticipation and removal of milk quotas in 2015, ammonia emissions have been on an upward trend. Dairy and non-dairy bovines comprise the bulk of agricultural ammonia, with these emissions arising principally from animal housing and storage and the landspreading of manures. While sources of fertiliser emissions have fluctuated in recent years (e.g. changing portion of urea and overall amount), there has been a significant decline since the peak in the late 1990s due to a combination of reduced fertiliser use arising from our Nitrates Action Programme.

My Department is actively considering all options for how best to control emissions and specifically in relation to ammonia it is currently preparing an Advisory Code for Good Agricultural Practice to Control Ammonia Emissions. Furthermore, we have a whole territory approach to nitrates implementation so all farmers are obliged to abide by nutrient management planning which has many synergies with reducing ammonia through the efficient use of animal manure.

The Nitrates Action Programme (NAP) gives effect to the Nitrates Directive; in late 2017 Ireland agreed with the European Commission on its fourth NAP for the period 2018 – 2021. The Nitrates Action Programme agreed includes a balanced programme of measures supporting

the objectives of achieving good water quality while at the same time encouraging sustainable and efficient agricultural practices. The measures in Ireland's derogation take account of the growing numbers of derogation farmers who are farming at intensive stocking rates, and also environmental objectives for water, climate change and ammonia which Ireland must achieve. For example, a new condition for derogation farms has been included in that from 2018, 50% or more of slurry must be applied by 15 June and after that it must be applied by using low emission slurry spreading (LESS) equipment.

Ammonia losses from slurry are significantly reduced by slurry application in the springtime and also by using LESS equipment. My Department supports grant aid for LESS equipment under the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme known as TAMS II and supports the application of slurry via LESS equipment as an option in the GLAS agri-environment scheme.

Modern trailing shoe slurry spreaders and new fertiliser formulations will help to reduce ammonia emissions. Covered slurry stores also offer some potential, however, it is only feasible for outdoor slurry stores and is only beneficial if subsequent slurry spreading is via trailing shoe; otherwise ammonia protected during storage will then be available for release at spreading stage. As mentioned above, investment in trailing shoe machinery is supported by the Rural Development Programme.

Research also plays a key role in improving our emissions reporting: the recent AGRI-I project, funded by my Department, has resulted in changes to nitrous oxide emissions factors for synthetic fertiliser and dung and urine by grazing animals, thereby, improving calculation of these emissions in the National Inventory.

Continued support under the Department's Research Stimulus Fund for ammonia research is essential to focus on improving our emissions reporting and emissions factors, in particular our emissions factors for manure storage and housing.

My Department funded the recently completed *Sustainable nitrogen fertiliser Use and Disaggregated Emissions of Nitrogen (SUDEN) project* which was led by Teagasc, with AFBI and UCD partnering, identified that farmers can maintain yields and reduce ammonia loss to the environment.

Another ongoing funded project by my Department is Measurement and Abatement of ammonia emissions from agriculture (LowAmmo) which is focusing specifically on addressing knowledge gaps in national ammonia emissions data.

Achieving the required ammonia reduction targets is a significant challenge and one my Department is actively engaged with.

Animal Welfare

293. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a budget will be allocated to his Department's early warning system that operates locally to provide assistance and support to farmers before welfare problems emerge. [17280/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Department operates an Early Warning/Intervention System (EWS) which is an initiative, introduced by the Farm Animal Welfare Advisory Council (FAWAC) and includes representatives from the farming bodies, the ISPCA and officials from my Department. Its objective is to provide a framework in which farm animal welfare problems can be identified before they become critical and facilitates the provision of emergency assistance at an early stage. The EWS has served

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a very useful purpose over the years and the nature of its operation at county level has the benefit of its members being able to deal sympathetically with any emergency animal welfare situation occurring on farms. Farming and animal welfare organisations throughout the country are well acquainted with its operation and a considerable amount of work continues to be undertaken by those bodies at local level through the dissemination of information. Under the EWS arrangements, my officials, have been in a position to assist farmers who contacted the regional and district veterinary offices directly or via the Animal Welfare Helpline Call Save: 0761 064408, seeking the provision/purchase of emergency feed supplies and these requests have been dealt with appropriately. Sufficient resources are available for the conduct of the EWS arrangements.

The dedicated e-mail address and help-line are in place for reporting suspected cases of animal welfare. Helpline phone No: Call Save - 0761 064408, phone - 01 607 2379, dedicated email address - *animalwelfare@agriculture.gov.ie*

Farm Inspections

294. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if flexibility will be shown to farmers regarding cross compliance inspections and Bord Bia audits (details supplied). [17281/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The EU regulations governing the Direct Payment Schemes and Rural Development measures require my Department to conduct inspections to ensure compliance with scheme eligibility criteria and Cross Compliance requirements. These inspections, including cross compliance, are mandatory and there are minimum numbers and types of inspections that must take place annually.

My Department's inspecting officers are fully aware of the difficulties being encountered by farmers due to the adverse weather conditions and the associated fodder issues. Each inspected case will have all factors, including the poor weather conditions, taken into account both during the inspection and when arriving at any decision on the outcome of an inspection.

Inspecting Officers endeavour to maintain a positive engagement with farmers and to be mindful of any situation where it is evident that a farmer may be under stress. Bord Bia audits are an operational matter for An Bord Bia; I will request officials in my Department to refer the question to An Bord Bia for direct reply to the Deputy.

Beef Data and Genomics Programme

295. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the ongoing delays in issuing genotyping tags for the Beef Data and Genomics Programme and the difficulties for suckler farmers. [17282/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Beef Data and Genomics Programme provides for six years of payments to participating farmers for completion of actions which deliver accelerated genetic improvement in the Irish national herd and improvement of its environmental sustainability. A key requirement of the Programme is that participants must take genomic samples from selected animals using tags supplied to them.

Genomic test tags required under the BDGP have already issued in respect of two thirds of the animals to be tested for the 2018 scheme year and all tags will have issued by the week beginning 23 April. For the first time in 2018, there are multiple providers of genomic test tags

in the market which required my Department to offer all BDGP participants the opportunity to nominate their tag supplier of choice.

Inland Fisheries Ireland

296. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a matter will be addressed regarding a trust (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17172/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) is the state Agency with responsibility for the conservation, protection, development and promotion of the Inland Fisheries resource. IFI have developed a research programme which is focused on the establishment of the root causes of the reported collapse of the Lough Currane sea trout population. IFI have also briefed the Waterville Lakes and Rivers Trust on the proposed programme. I am advised that it is intended that this research programme will be implemented subject to the availability of funding.

Angling Sector

297. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the grants available for angling clubs to provide classes (details supplied); the details of same; the person or body to contact in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17198/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): I have been advised by Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) that all funding schemes are advertised on their website – www.fisheriesireland.ie, their weekly ezine, social media and by press release to angling representative federations and the general media. The latest funding scheme for financial support closed for applications on 22 January 2018. It is expected that the next scheme will open later this year. IFI's Sponsorship Fund aims to support large international competitions held in Ireland which showcase Ireland's angling offering and contribute to local economies. The fund also contributes to novice angler events which increase participation in angling among those who want to begin, or who have recently taken up, fishing as a hobby. It also helps initiatives which disseminate information that promote conservation and protection of the inland fisheries and sea angling resource and can include seminars, workshops and training. Support from the Sponsorship Fund can be either financial or resource support from Inland Fisheries Ireland staff members.

I am providing the Deputy with direct contact details in IFI for the Sponsorship Scheme. The club should monitor IFI's website in case additional funds become available and should also register for the IFI ezine and follow IFI announcements on social media. I am also providing direct contact details in IFI in that regard.

Contact Details – Inland Fisheries Ireland

Sponsorship Scheme – Paul O'Reilly (paul.oreilly@fisheriesireland.ie)

Ezine registration / Communications – Myles Kelly (myles.kelly@fisheriesireland.ie).

Environmental Regulations

298. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the way in which he plans to deal with the legal and reputational consequences for Ireland should it breach its statutory obligations under the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants in view of the fact that An Bord Pleanála has approved a company's (details supplied) application for an incinerator at a location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17208/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I refer to the reply to Question No. 1197 of 17 April 2018. The position is unchanged.

Environmental Protection Agency

299. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the way in which the Environmental Protection Agency, EPA, plans to assess and monitor the risks to human health from carcinogenic dioxins in view of the fact that An Bord Pleanála has approved a company's (details supplied) application for an incinerator at a location; the way in which it will enforce the terms of a future toxic incineration licence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17209/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The EPA is responsible for the licence and enforcement of large industrial plants listed in the First Schedule of the EPA Act 1992 (as amended). This includes incineration and co-incineration plants. The Industrial Emissions Directive (2010/75/EU) specifies the emission limit values for dioxins that apply to incineration and co-incineration facilities. This Directive also stipulates the frequency at which licensees must monitor dioxins. Conditions implementing the Directive's requirements are written into Industrial Emissions Licences granted by the EPA. The reports of all monitoring conducted by licensed facilities are submitted to the EPA for assessment, and are available on the EPA's website.

In addition, the EPA carries out a programme of independent air emissions monitoring at industrial licensed sites to check compliance with the emission limit values specified in the licence. If dioxin monitoring is specified in an Industrial Emissions Licence, then the facility is monitored by the EPA on at least an annual basis. Monitoring visits are typically unannounced, and the reports of the monitoring are available on the EPA's website.

Broadband Service Provision

300. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the rollout of high speed broadband connectivity in County Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17217/18]

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. Since this Government came into office almost 400,000 additional premises 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 NBP.

The Map is colour coded and searchable by address/eircode:

- The AMBER areas represent the target areas for the proposed State led Intervention under the NBP and are the subject of an ongoing procurement process.

- The BLUE represent those areas where commercial providers are either currently delivering or have plans to deliver high speed broadband services.

- The LIGHT BLUE areas represent eir's commercial rural deployment plans to rollout high speed broadband to 300,000 premises by the end of this year as part of a Commitment Agreement signed with me in April.

There are just over 97,000 premises in Limerick. Nearly 22,000 (22%) fall within the AMBER area and will be covered under the State led Intervention. Just over 65,000 (67%) of premises are in a BLUE area and are or will be covered by commercial providers, while almost 10,500 (11%) are LIGHT BLUE and fall to be covered by eir's planned rural deployment.

In April 2017, I signed a Commitment Agreement with eir in relation to its plans to provide high speed broadband to 300,000 premises in rural areas on a commercial basis. eir has committed to completing the rollout by the end of 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 of committed premises as of December 2017, including approximately 4,850 in Co. Limerick, including areas such as Dooradoyle, Kildimo, Pallasgreen and Castleconnell.

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

301. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when the two independent studies into the proposed North-South Interconnector

will be received; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17327/18]

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 intended that the two studies will provide some clarity to the concerned residents of the affected areas. The Consultants undertaking the studies have finalised their reports and once considered in my department and submitted to me it is my intention that these will be brought to Government and made publicly available. This process will take a number of weeks .

Roads Maintenance Funding

302. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if emergency funding to local authorities to undertake emergency repairs of road surfaces and footpaths damaged during recent extreme weather conditions will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17245/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of local authorities, 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.

I announced the 2018 regional and local road allocations on 29th January and all grant funding available to my Department has now been allocated. It is a matter 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 at present.

Bus Services

303. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the fact no buses serve Dublin Airport from Dublin 13; his plans to introduce new bus routes which will serve the Airport from Dublin 13; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17142/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) in conjunction with the relevant transport operator 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 reply within ten working days.

Road Network

304. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he and his Department continue to assess the need for upgrade to facilitate extra traffic on the N4 Maynooth to Dublin and other similar over trafficked routes; when such plans will be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17153/18]

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

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

Roads Maintenance Funding

305. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his Department has received a request from Kildare County Council for extra funding to repair the damage to roads in the county following the recent inclement weather; when he expects to be in a position to respond; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17154/18]

309. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has received correspondence Kildare County Council outlining the extent of damage to local and regional roads in County Kildare as a result of severe weather conditions; if the precise costs have been determined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17206/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 305 and 309 together.

The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of local authorities, 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.

I announced the 2018 regional and local road allocations on 29th January and all grant funding available to my Department has now been allocated. To date I have not received any correspondence from Kildare County Council relating to damage on regional and local roads arising from recent severe weather. It is for each Council to determine its priorities and decide its work programme taking available grant funding and its own resources into account. At present, there is no additional funding available to my Department.

Tourism Industry

306. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the remedial works being carried out in view of his Department's recent contact with boat operators that carry tourists to Inishmurray Island off County Sligo to immediately cease advertising or carrying out visits to the Island; when they will commence and be completed in order to save the 2018 tourist season in the north west; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17165/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): With specific regard to the remedial works to which the Deputy refers, I under-

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stand that these relate to landing facilities for boats on Inishmurray Island following concerns conveyed by my Department relating to safety during embarkation and disembarkation at the island. Neither my Department nor its agencies have any role or responsibility with regard to such facilities or related remedial works. I suggest that this may be a matter more relevant to the Local Authority – in this case, Sligo County Council – for which the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government is responsible.

Cruinnithe an Aire

307. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Iompair, Turasóireachta agus Spóirt an bhfuair sé iarratas ó Choiste Dhoire Fhearta ar an gCeathrú Rua i Mí na Márta nó le gairid á iarraidh air casadh le toscaireacht ón gcoiste chun drochstad Bhóthar Dhoire Fhearta a phlé; má fuair, cén uair atá sé i gceist aige casadh leis an gcoiste; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [17184/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Bhí teagmháil agam le Cumann na nÁitritheoirí maidir le drochbhail Bóthar Derrartha le linn cuairt a thabhairt ar Ghaillimh Dé hAoine 2ú Feabhra. Is féidir liom a dhearbhú go raibh teagmháil níos mó ag an ngrúpa liom le déanaí agus cé nach bhfuil mé in ann bualadh leo thug mé nuashonrú don ghrúpa maidir le hiarratais ó údarais bóithre reachtúla a bhreithniú maidir le cúnaimh deontais le haghaidh feabhsúcháin bóthair oibreacha. Is é Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe an t-údarás bóthair reachtúil sa chás seo agus tá sé freagrach as bóithre a fheabhsú agus a chothabháil ina réimse freagrachta.

Rail Services

308. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will liaise with the National Transport Authority to put a commuter daily rate ticket scheme in place for persons that avail of the rail network to get to work on a daily basis (details supplied). [17205/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. However, I am not involved in the day to day operations of public transport, nor decisions on the issue of rail fares in any part of the country.

Following the establishment of the National Transport Authority (NTA) in December 2009, the NTA is the statutory body with responsibility for the regulation of fares charged by the public transport providers.

I have therefore forwarded the Deputy’s question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Question No. 309 answered with Question No. 305.

Public Transport Data

310. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number

of passengers that availed of student tickets on Irish Rail in each year since 2011, in tabular form. [17230/18]

311. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of passengers that availed of student Leap cards on Dublin Bus in each year since 2011, in tabular form. [17231/18]

312. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of passengers that availed of student tickets on Bus Éireann in each year since 2011, in tabular form. [17232/18]

313. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of passengers that availed of child tickets on Irish Rail in each year since 2011, in tabular form. [17233/18]

314. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of passengers that availed of child tickets on Dublin Bus in each year since 2011, in tabular form. [17234/18]

315. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of passengers that availed of child tickets on Bus Éireann in each year since 2011, in tabular form. [17235/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 310 to 315, inclusive, together.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) is responsible for the collection and publication of statistics relating to public transport and I have forwarded the Deputy's questions to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Bus Éireann Services

316. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a commerciality review of all routes serviced by Bus Éireann's Expressway service has been conducted. [17329/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. Expressway services are operated by Bus Éireann on a commercial basis in a similar fashion to any other commercial licensed bus service. Commercial licensed bus services do not receive any taxpayer funding, in contrast to those socially necessary but financially unviable services which make up the PSO network. Decisions regarding commercial licensed bus services are matters for the operator concerned, subject to the licensing arrangements of the NTA.

I have therefore forwarded the Deputy's question to Bus Éireann for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Noise Pollution

317. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the dates and purpose of meetings he has held with relevant stakeholders since his decision to award Fin-

gal County Council the competent authority for noise regulation at Dublin Airport. [17332/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The work carried out since the Government decision at the beginning of the year has involved officials - from my Department and the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government - working on Draft Heads of a Bill. That work, which I am advised has been very detailed and technical in nature, is primarily focusing on the interaction between the Noise Regulation, the EU Environmental Noise Directive and the planning framework. When this is complete, the next step will be to engage the Office of the Attorney General with draft Heads of a Bill.

At a point when there is clarity on the final regulatory model, including formal Draft Heads, there will be opportunity for a round of stakeholder engagements, in advance of the pre-legislative scrutiny of a draft General Scheme.

Roads Maintenance Funding

318. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to increase the financial allocation to local authorities for the non-national road network in view of the increasing costs of road repairs and the substantial damage caused to this road network due to adverse weather conditions over the past number of months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17334/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of local authorities, 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.

I announced the 2018 regional and local road allocations on 29 January and all grant funding available to my Department has now been allocated. It is a matter 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. At present, there is no additional funding available to my Department.

Domestic Violence Refuges Provision

319. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to the COSC review of the National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence 2010-2014 (details supplied), if her attention has been drawn to the fact that services for male victims of domestic violence constitute less than 1% of the total spent by voluntary services in the sector; if her attention has been further drawn to the fact that there are no services for male victims of domestic violence in Dublin, Cork, Galway and Limerick; if her attention has been drawn to the fact that there are no shelters for male victims and their children; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17218/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, assumed statutory responsibility, upon its establishment in 2014, for the care and protection of victims of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence.

Tusla has worked, and continues to work, to develop an informed understanding of domestic, sexual and gender based violence, and to take account of the range of issues and the differ-

ent manifestations of the types of violence and abuse, including where males are victims.

Over the last two years Tusla, along with organisations that work with male victims and survivors of domestic violence, has worked to identify factors that prevent men from seeking help, to determine approaches that would increase men's willingness to seek services, and to identify the types of services that are likely to be most effective in responding to male victims/survivors.

Amen is a dedicated national support service for male victims of domestic abuse. Amen provides crisis intervention and a helpline to male victims of domestic violence throughout the country. Face-to face supports are also available on an outreach basis.

At present, face-to-face supports are available directly from Amen's office in County Meath, as well as an outreach service in Dublin. Additional funding was provided to Amen in 2017 for the development of pilot outreach services in Kilkenny, Ennis, Athlone, Galway and Donegal.

Tusla has allocated funding of €239,900 to Amen in 2018, which represents an increase of €93,400 over 2016 funding levels, or an increase of 64% over two years.

Funding to Amen represented 1.4% of the total funding provided by Tusla to Domestic Violence services in 2017. There are also services based in Counties Cork and Offaly which specifically provide services to both male and female victims of domestic abuse. 2016 statistics indicate that 13% of service users to Cork One Stop Shop were male, and 14% of service users to Offaly Domestic Violence Support Service were male.

Tusla has advised that there is currently no emergency shelter for male victims of domestic violence. Tusla continues to engage with stakeholders with a view to identifying models of intervention that are most likely to meet the priority needs of male victims of domestic abuse.

Early Childhood Care and Education Funding

320. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the first and full year cost of extending the early childhood care and education programme year by periods (details supplied). [17199/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The estimated cost of extending the ECCE programme, as specified by the Deputy, is contained in the table below. These figures are based on current rates for the ECCE 2017/2018 programme year. It should be noted that this question only addresses the financial aspect of such increases. Any such changes would require revision of rules around eligibility and enrolment dates and would need to look at issues of capacity with regard to physical space, staffing capacities and other associated matters.

The actual cost of this proposal would be subject to a number of factors including actual levels of participation, and the number of children subvented at the 'higher capitation' rate- costs increase as the number of higher qualified staff increase.

Weeks	Costs
38 (current ECCE cycle)	276m
39 (1 week increase)	283.3m
40 (2 week increase)	290.5m
41 (3 week increase)	297.8m
42 (4 week increase)	305.1m

Weeks	Costs
43 (5 week increase)	312.3m
44 (6 week increase)	319.6m
45 (7 week increase)	326.8m
46 (8 week increase)	334.1m

Area Based Childhood Programme

321. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the amount of funding provided to the ABC programme for 2018; the number of centres this funding supports; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17200/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Area Based Childhood (ABC) Programme is a prevention and early intervention initiative led by my Department.

In last year's budget, my department secured additional grant funding to support the extension of the entire ABC Programme into 2018. An original commitment was given to support the programme to the end of August 2018 to align with the completion of the National Evaluation and ABC sites were requested to submit budgets for January to August, 2018. On that basis an overall funding budget of €5.6m was allocated to the ABC sites.

I have since given a commitment to support the current ABC Programme for the full year in 2018. ABC sites have recently submitted full year cost projections for 2018 and my Department is in the process of confirming final grant funding budgets for 2018 in the coming weeks. It is expected that the full budget to be allocated to sites in 2018 will be in the region of €8.5m.

There are 13 sites across Ireland, participating in the ABC Programme. These are located in Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Louth, Wicklow, and the Midlands.

Family Resource Centres

322. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the amount of funding provided to the family resource centre network in 2010; the number of centres that this supported; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17201/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Family Resource Centres provide a holistic service of child, family and community support, and advocacy, to all children and families in their communities.

Prior to the establishment of Tusla in January 2014, the former Family Support Agency was responsible for the Family Resource Centre Programme. Funding of €15.37m was allocated under the Programme in 2010 and this supported 107 Family Resource Centres in that year. Tusla, the Child and Family Agency has been responsible for the administration of the Family Resource Centre Programme since its establishment on 1st January, 2014.

Supporting families is an important priority for me as the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, and the increased level of funding for Family Resource Centres in 2018 reflects this. I am pleased to be in a position to support the work of Family Resource Centres through the

targeting of additional resources to services that will impact positively on vulnerable children and families.

Affordable Childcare Scheme Eligibility

323. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the method used to determine the level of subsidy that a household is eligible for under the affordable childcare scheme. [17202/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Under the Affordable Childcare Scheme, a family will be able to benefit from either a universal or a targeted subsidy. The level of subsidy will depend on the age of the child and, in the case of targeted subsidies, family income and parents' participation in work or study.

Universal subsidies will be available for families whose children are between 6 months and 36 months old (or who are not yet eligible to participate in the ECCE scheme, if later). The subsidy will amount to €0.50 per hour, and will be available for up to 40 hours per week.

Targeted subsidies will be available for families with net incomes below €47,500 whose children are between 6 months and 15 years old and who are availing of registered childcare. The main determinant of the level of subsidy will be net family income. Net family income will be determined on the basis of the combined income of the applicant and the applicant's partner, and the scheme will allow for the deduction from gross income of income tax, PRSI, USC, pension contributions, maintenance payments made, and a number of social welfare and related payments in line with planned legislation, namely the Childcare Support Bill 2017 and regulations to be made thereunder. The highest levels of subsidy will go to families with the lowest incomes, with the level of subsidy tapering down smoothly as income rises towards the maximum net income threshold of €47,500.

The level of subsidy will also depend on the age of the child. Higher subsidies will be awarded to families with younger children, to reflect the higher cost of providing childcare for younger children as a result of the higher adult-child ratios required by the Early Years Regulations.

In addition, the level of subsidy will reflect parents' participation in work or study. For families in which both parents (or the parent in a one-parent family) are in work or studying, enhanced hours of up to 40 hours of subsidy per week will be available. For families in which one or both parents is not working or studying, standard hours of up to 15 hours per week may be awarded.

Recent amendments to the Childcare Support Bill 2017, which is still progressing through the Houses of the Oireachtas, have extended the range of circumstances that must be considered in determining the rules on the number of hours of subsidy to be awarded each week. These circumstances have been extended to include specified situations in which a parent is unavailable to care for the child (e.g. because a parent is in hospital long-term), and temporary changes of circumstances in a parent's work or study (e.g. to allow bridging periods between phases of work or study).

The hours of subsidy awarded will also depend on whether a child is taking part in ECCE or is at school, as the hours of subsidy under the Affordable Childcare Scheme are intended to wrap around a child's participation in ECCE or school, as well as meeting childcare needs outside of term-time.

ACS will be fairer and more accessible than the current targeted childcare programmes, under which many low-income families are not currently able to access subsidised childcare because of the requirement to be in receipt of certain State benefits or attending certain training programmes.

A further benefit of the method for determining the level of subsidy under the Affordable Childcare Scheme will be its flexibility, as the Scheme will allow for adjustment of income thresholds, subsidy rates and income taper rates over time and as further Government investment becomes available.

Affordable Childcare Scheme Data

324. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the households in receipt of subsidies under the affordable childcare scheme by gross income bracket (details supplied). [17203/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Under the Affordable Childcare Scheme, a family will be able to benefit from either a universal or a targeted subsidy. The basis for determining the level of targeted subsidy will be a family's net income, rather than gross income. Given the variation in tax situations between families, it is therefore not possible to state definitively the subsidy that will be awarded to a family with a given gross income, nor is it possible to provide detailed forecasts of the number of families that will receive subsidies under the Scheme by gross income bracket.

Basing the level of subsidy on a family's net income rather than their gross income provides a fairer reflection of the resources available to a family, as well as ensuring an equitable approach as regards the assessment of income that is taxable and income that is not taxable. Basing the income assessment on net income also reduces the risk of high effective marginal tax rates as subsidies are withdrawn in line with increasing income. As such, the approach is supportive of equity and labour market activation policy objectives and should ensure that the scheme is helpful to working families on low to moderate incomes.

The Regulatory Impact Assessment of the scheme included analysis by the ESRI of the impact of the scheme on families at different points in the income distribution. The table, which is extracted from the Regulatory Impact Assessment and attached as part of this answer, shows the impact of the scheme by income decile, demonstrating that the benefits of the scheme will primarily go to those in the lower half of the income distribution, but that the universal element of the scheme will give some benefits to families at all levels of the distribution. (Please refer to the attached document.)

Finally, some examples of the targeted subsidies for which different families on different net incomes will qualify are set out below.

Affordable Childcare Scheme Case Studies

(all based on illustrative example fees of €4.80 per hour for 1 year olds, €4.60 per hour for 2 year olds, and €4.40 per hour for school-age children)

A. A lone parent on net annual income of €22,700, with one child aged 2 years and in need of 40 hours of childcare per week, will qualify for a weekly subsidy of €167 and might be expected to have a corresponding co-payment of €17.

B. A family with a net annual income of €25,000, with two children aged 1 and 2.5 years

and in need of 25 hours of childcare per week, will qualify for a weekly subsidy of €214 and might be expected to have a co-payment of €21.

C. A family with a net annual income of €35,000, with two children aged 1 and 2.5 years and in need of 25 hours of childcare per week, will qualify for a weekly subsidy of €149 and might be expected to have a co-payment of €86.

D. A family with a net annual income of €47,500, with two children aged 2 years (40 hours childcare per week) and 5 years (17 hours out-of-school care per week) will qualify for a weekly subsidy of €52 and may have a co-payment of €207.

[[/debates%20authoring/webattachments.nsf/0/6E6B92A0923BAFBD802582740058F2D0/\\$File/Disposable%20income.docx?openelement](/debates%20authoring/webattachments.nsf/0/6E6B92A0923BAFBD802582740058F2D0/$File/Disposable%20income.docx?openelement)].

Library Services Funding

325. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the funding allocated to library services for Galway County Council in each of the years 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018; the funding allocated to each branch library in County Galway for 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17163/18]

326. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the amount of funding allocated for a part-time library service in Ballygar, County Galway, in each of the years 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17164/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I propose to take Questions Nos. 325 and 326 together.

The delivery of public library services is generally a matter for each local authority in its capacity as a library authority under the Local Government Act 2001. Accordingly, funding for the management and development of library services in Galway City and Galway County is primarily a matter for those local authorities. Details of the funding invested in the library service in Galway, including funding for individual library branches, can be obtained directly from Galway City and County Councils.

That said, my Department provides funding to supplement investment by local authorities in their library services. Funding is provided, for example, as a contribution towards the cost of developing library buildings, technological capacity and resources, book-stock and other areas of activity that enhance local library services.

Details of funding provided by my Department to Galway City and Galway County library services from 2016 to 2018 is set out in the table below - the figures reflect the combined funding provided to Galway City and Galway County library services as these are managed as a single library authority by Galway County Council.

Category of Spend	2016	2017	2018
Library Lease Contribution	€136,606	€123,030	-
1916 Book-fund	€6,255	-	-

Category of Spend	2016	2017	2018
My Open Library (service technology and infrastructure - Oranmore and Ballinasloe libraries)	€98,688	-	-
Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) (tagging for Book-stock)	-	€13,952	-
Our Public Libraries Strategy Funding (ICT/RFID, book-stock, hot-desk facilities)	-	€141,805	-
Total Payments	€241,549	€278,787	-

Departmental Funding

327. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the level of grant aid or funding that is available for voluntary or community groups that wish to establish a community and-or sports hall in their area; the level of funding available to enable such a project to proceed to a successful conclusion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17349/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): Funding may be available through my Department's Town and Village Renewal Scheme and the LEADER Programme to voluntary or community groups who wish to establish a community or sports hall in their area.

The Town and Village Renewal Scheme was launched in 2016, with funding of €10 million allocated for that year. An enhanced Town and Village Renewal scheme was announced in 2017, with an emphasis on projects that would have a sustainable and visible impact on towns or villages and their environs and could demonstrate economic impact or potential. In October 2017, I announced the allocation of €21.6 million to 281 projects in towns and villages across rural Ireland under the scheme.

Under Budget 2018, I have secured an allocation of €15 million for this year's Town and Village Renewal Scheme. Details of the scheme are currently being finalised and I am planning to launch the 2018 scheme shortly. I will again be placing an emphasis on projects that can demonstrate strong economic benefits for towns, villages and their environs.

It is anticipated that as in previous years Local Authorities will be invited to submit applications to the Department for consideration.

Local Authorities will be required to advertise for expressions of interest from towns and villages in their area and proposals to develop a community or sports hall may be considered if the application displays a strong economic benefit to the community and falls within the criteria of the 2018 Town and Village Renewal Scheme.

Local Authorities will select a number of projects for development into detailed applications to be submitted to the Department.

Capital funding may also be available under my Department's LEADER Programme to develop or renovate community centres or sports halls. LEADER is a multi-annual EU co-funded programme to support rural development. Ireland has an allocation of €250 million under the programme over the period 2014-2020, including both national and EU funding. LEADER is delivered through Local Action Groups in 28 rural areas around the country.

In order for a project to be eligible for LEADER funding, it must be compatible with the actions outlined in the approved Local Development Strategy in the area concerned, and it must comply with the Operating Rules and EU Regulations in place for the programme.

The decision to approve a project, or otherwise, is a matter for the Local Action Group in the relevant area.

Applications for funding can be made directly to the relevant Local Action Groups. Contact details for all Local Action Groups are available on my Department's website www.drcd.gov.ie/rural/development/leader

Carer's Allowance Applications

328. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for a carer's allowance by a person (details supplied). [17158/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a person who has such a disability that they require that level of care.

I confirm that my department received an application for CA from the person concerned on the 18 January 2018.

Additional information was requested from the person concerned on 17 April 2018. Once the information is received the application will be processed and he will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Appeals

329. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an oral hearing will be arranged in the case of a person (details supplied). [17160/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): An application for domiciliary care allowance (DCA) was received from this lady on the 28th August 2017. This application was not allowed as the child was not considered to satisfy the qualifying conditions for the allowance. A letter issued on the 23rd November 2017 outlining the decision of the deciding officer to refuse the allowance.

An appeal of the decision was requested on the 28th December 2017. As part of the appeal process the DCA claim was reviewed by a deciding officer who determined that a revised decision was not warranted. The lady concerned was notified of this decision on the 26th March 2018. The application has now been forwarded to the Social Welfare Appeals Office for further

consideration.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals

330. **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. [17185/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer on 6 April 2018, who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Free Travel Scheme Data

331. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the amount of funding her Department has provided to each transport company that participates in the free travel scheme since 2011, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17225/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The free travel scheme permits free travel on most CIE public transport services, Luas and a range of services offered by some 80 private operators in various parts of the country for those eligible under the scheme. The free travel scheme is available to all people aged over 66 living permanently in the State. Applicants who are under age 66 must be in receipt of a qualifying payment and permanently living in the State in order to qualify for the scheme. There are currently 908,675 customers in receipt of Free Travel.

The table details expenditure by my Department in respect of the free travel scheme in the period 2011 - 2017.

-	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011
CIE	€61,549,082.83	€61,400,861.94	€60,951,683.05	€61,211,880.11	€61,290,112.66	€61,201,721	€61,358,000
Private Operators	€8,804,859.89	€8,521,233.43	€7,055,713.71	€6,760,076.49	€7,166,056.38	€7,411,480	€7,675,000
NTA / POBAL	€1,500,000.00	€1,500,000.00	€1,500,000.00	€1,500,000.00	€1,500,000	€1,500,000	€1,500,000
Luas / Transdev	€3,907,500.00	3,907,499.64	€3,747,235.23	€4,067,764.77	€3,907,500.00	€3,862,457	€3,907,500
Cross Border	€1,686,933.32	€1,708,423.27	€1,852,983.28	€1,824,193.04	€1,487,936.11	€1,419,412	€1,072,500
AIFT	€97,783.57	€73,937.91	€114,183.51	€123,407.57	€125,728.93	€122,732	€84,000

Until the end of 2017, my Department paid the CIE Group centrally and the apportionment of payment between its three constituent companies – Bus Éireann, Dublin Bus and Irish Rail – was a matter for the CIE Group to determine itself. However, since Jan 2018, a separate block payment is made to the CIE Group in respect Bus Éireann - Expressway.

The Department does not provide information on the amount of money paid to individual private operators participating in the Free Travel Scheme as this information is considered commercially sensitive.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Appeals

332. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an application for a disability allowance by a person (details supplied) will be expedited. [17283/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer on 6 April 2018 who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Applications

333. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) is not on the full rate of payment of invalidity pension; and if the claim will be re-examined with a view to paying the maximum benefit and back dating same. [17289/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Invalidity pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

To qualify for IP a claimant must, inter-alia, have at least 260 (5 years) paid PRSI contributions since entering social insurance and 48 contributions paid or credited in the last complete contribution year before the date of their claim.

The department received a claim for IP for the gentleman concerned on the 15 April 2011. He was ineligible for IP under national legislation on the grounds that the contribution conditions for the scheme were not satisfied.

EU Regulations provide that insurance contributions made in any other EU Member State may be aggregated with Irish contributions in order to satisfy the contribution conditions for payment of a pro-rata IP. A request was sent to the Polish social security authorities requesting his Polish insurance record. Receipt of this information confirmed that he satisfied the contribution criteria for IP under EU Regulations and as he satisfied all other qualifying conditions the person concerned was awarded a pro-rata IP from the 21 April 2011. He qualified for pro-rata IP at 35.99% of the basic rate thus entitling him a reduced rate and he receives an increase for a qualified child payable at half rate.

19 April 2018

Disability allowance (DA) is a weekly allowance paid to people with a specified disability who are aged over 16 and under 66. The disability must be expected to last for at least one year and the allowance is subject to a medical assessment, a means test and a habitual residency test. Full details of the qualifying criteria for the scheme are available on the Department's website www.welfare.ie. An application form for DA has issued to the gentleman concerned should he wish to apply.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Eligibility

334. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the age for progress to disability allowance will remain at 18 years in view of the fact changes would have a significant financial impact on families; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17330/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am assuming that the Deputy is referring to recommendations made in the "Make Work Pay for People with Disabilities" report. Following a commitment made in the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for people with disabilities 2015 -2024, the "Make Work Pay for People with Disabilities" report was published in April 2017. The report undertook to better identify how people with disabilities could be supported to achieve their employment ambitions.

A national consultation process has recently concluded which was organised to engage people with disabilities, parents of children with disabilities, and sectoral representatives to seek their views on specific recommendations in the report.

The consultation reflects a commitment made at the time of the publication of the MWP report to consult widely with persons with disabilities and their families in relation to the recommendations about the principle of early engagement and a proposed reconfiguration of the Disability Allowance payment. One MWP recommendation is to support young adults through education, training and social inclusion according to their capacity, and to change the qualifying age for disability allowance from 16 to 18 years of age while leaving Domiciliary Care allowance in payment where applicable to 18 years of age.

The national consultation process concluded on April 13th and now will be followed by further consideration of the results with a stakeholder focus group. This group comprises of persons with experience of disability issues and was established last September and has helped my Department with the design of the national consultation process.

I together with my Government colleagues, look forward to learning the outcome of the consultation process in due course.

I hope this clarifies the issue for the deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

335. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the position on a review of an application for carer's allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17348/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):

Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a person who has such a disability that they require that level of care.

My department received an application for CA from the person concerned on 22 November 2016.

It is a condition for receipt of CA that every claimant shall furnish such certificates, documents, information and evidence as may be required for the purposes of deciding their claim.

The person was requested to provide bank statements and evidence pertaining to the cessation of his self-employment, but did not do so.

Accordingly a deciding officer decided that he was not entitled to CA.

The person concerned was notified on 3 May 2017 of this decision, the reason for it and of his right of review and appeal.

A review of this decision was requested on 22 May 2017. Although some documents were supplied on 25 July 2017, there were still bank statements outstanding. As a result, the deciding officer confirmed the original decision.

The person concerned was notified on 4 October 2017 of the outcome of this review and of his right of appeal.

Further documents were received on 4 April 2018 and the matter was referred back to the local social welfare inspector (SWI) to complete the earlier investigation that was suspended following the failure of the person concerned to supply documents as requested.

Once the SWI has reported, a decision will be made and the person concerned notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Payments

336. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason for the refusal to issue disability allowance through the person's bank in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17381/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Except in certain exceptional circumstances, disability allowance (DA) is not payable for any period in respect of which the claimant is resident outside of the State. In all circumstances, disability allowance recipients must inform the Department that they are intending to leave the State.

For control reasons, the Department has decided that the appropriate payment method for the person concerned is collection at his nearest Post Office. The person in question has appointed an agent to collect payments on his behalf.

The Department is aware of the person's desire to have their payment made by electronic fund transfer to their bank account and is keeping the matter under review.

Jobseeker's Allowance Payments

337. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the basis on which a reduced level of jobseeker's allowance is being paid in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17382/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned is in receipt of a jobseekers allowance payment at a reduced rate. The reduced rate arises from an assessment of means derived from rental income. The decision was upheld by a Social Welfare Appeals Officer and the person concerned was advised by the social welfare appeals office of the decision on 12/10/17.

A letter issued from Newbridge Intreo Office on 24/10/17 advising the person concerned of the award of their claim and a further letter issued to them on 26/10/17 advising the details of an arrears payment of €3,448.

Please note that an incorrect PPSN has been quoted in the detail of the PQ and does not refer to the person concerned.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Planning Issues

338. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the steps he is taking to respond to concerns by a foreign direct investor (details supplied) that proposals to fast track planning applications for data centres are insufficient; and the status of legislative changes to ensure Ireland retains and attracts foreign direct investment in this area. [17317/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I am actively progressing a number of measures under my remit that are included in the Strategic Policy Framework agreed by Government in October 2017 for the continued development of data centres in Ireland, as part of wider economic growth and balanced regional development.

The National Planning Framework, published in February of this year, includes an objective for the promotion of Ireland as a sustainable international destination for ICT infrastructure such as data centres and associated economic activities and embeds policy support for data centres into the planning policy hierarchy.

I will take the necessary steps shortly to amend the Planning and Development Act 2000 in order to classify data centres above a certain size as strategic infrastructure developments. This change will mean that applications for planning permission for larger data centres will be made direct to An Bord Pleanála, thereby streamlining the planning decision-making process. I will table the necessary legislative amendments by way of proposed amendments to the Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2016, which is currently at Seanad Committee Stage.

Following consultation with the Office of the Attorney General, I am also intending to put forward legislative proposals for streamlining judicial review of strategic infrastructure projects to Government later this year, seeking formal approval to draft the necessary legislative amendments. These proposals will aim to provide greater certainty in the timeframe for decision-making in the planning process.

I also intend to issue statutory planning guidelines under section 28 of the 2000 Act, requiring mandatory pre-application public participation in respect of windfarm development, which will serve as a pilot case to assess how best to obtain the benefits of public participation

in respect of SID projects. The outcome of this pilot will feed into a general review of existing planning legislation to determine if any other changes are necessary in respect of strategic infrastructure projects in the light of experience and following on from the recommendations of the Expert Group on the Review of An Bord Pleanála.

I am confident that implementation of the range of measures set out in the Government's Strategic Policy Framework for data centres will speed up the planning consent process for future data centres, without diminishing the crucial role of public and community consultations in the consideration of individual proposals for development.

Rent Controls

339. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the way in which rent increase caps appear not to govern student accommodation (details supplied); and his plans for changes to prevent such large rent increases. [17125/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): I refer to the reply to Questions No. 1491, 1556 and 1579 of 17 April 2018 which sets out the latest position in the matter.

Fire Service

340. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if funding will be provided for Dublin Fire Brigade to purchase new ladders that can reach up to 42 metres in height; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17143/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The provision of fire services in local authority areas, including the establishment and maintenance of fire brigades, the assessment of fire cover needs and the provision of premises, is a statutory function of the individual fire authorities under the provisions of the Fire Services Acts, 1981 and 2003.

My Department supports the fire authorities through setting national policy, providing a central training programme, issuing guidance on operational and other related matters and providing capital funding, including recoupment (within the overall funding available) of costs incurred by fire authorities in relation to the approved purchase of fire appliances and emergency equipment, as well as construction and upgrading of fire stations.

Dublin City Council provides fire services on behalf of the four Dublin local authorities. My Department has recently received an update report from Dublin City Council in relation to its fire appliance fleet and will liaise with the Council in relation to determining priority projects for financial support in the years ahead. Continued investment in the fire appliance fleet is one of the key national priorities for the Fire Services Capital Programme.

My Department announced a new national joint-procurement programme in 2017 to purchase 20 new fire appliances, under which Dublin City Council's Fire Service received an allocation of three new 'Class B' appliances. In 2015 under a similar programme, Dublin's Fire Service were also allocated three 'Class B' appliances. They requested and received approval to substitute the cost of one of those appliances to purchase a pre-used turntable ladder. In addition to these, since 2008, my Department has also funded four 'Class B' appliances and one turntable ladder for Dublin.

Management of the number, type and age profile of fire appliances is a matter for each of the fire authorities. In the assessment of their fire cover needs, including the provision and management of a fleet adequate to their requirements, fire service management use evidence based on multi-annual data of actual fires in determining fire station area risk categorisations and have regard to standards set out in the national policy document “Keeping Communities Safe” for benchmarking their services. My Department also includes the area risk categorisation process in determining priority projects for financial support.

All requests for funding from my Department’s Fire Services Capital Programme will be considered within the constraints of available resources and will have regard to local authorities’ priorities, the value for money offered by proposals and the totality of requests from fire authorities.

Pyrite Remediation Programme

341. **Deputy Fergus O’Dowd** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to open up the pyrite remediation scheme nationwide to assist homeowners that are adversely affected by same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17148/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The Pyrite Resolution Act 2013 provides the statutory framework for the establishment of the Pyrite Resolution Board and for the making of a pyrite remediation scheme to be implemented by the Board with support from the Housing Agency.

The provisions of the Act apply only to dwellings affected by significant damage attributable to pyritic heave consequent on the presence of reactive pyrite in the subfloor hardcore material and not to damage arising in any other circumstance, e.g. such as pyrite in concrete blocks.

The pyrite remediation scheme is a scheme of “last resort” for affected homeowners who have no other practical option to obtain redress and is limited in its application and scope. The full conditions for eligibility under the scheme are set out in the scheme which is available on the Board’s website, www.pyriteboard.ie.

The scheme is applicable to dwellings, which are subject to significant damage attributable to pyritic heave established, in accordance with I.S. 398-1:2013 - Reactive pyrite in sub-floor hardcore material – Part 1: Testing and categorisation protocol. In this regard, it is a condition of eligibility under the scheme that an application to the Board must be accompanied by a Building Condition Assessment with a Damage Condition Rating of 2. Dwellings which do not have a Damage Condition Rating of 2 are not eligible to apply under the scheme. This ensures that, having regard to the available resources, the focus of the scheme is on dwellings which are most severely damaged by pyritic heave. I have no proposals to amend this eligibility criterion.

As matters currently stand, the scheme is based on the information that was available to the Board at the time of its adoption in February 2014 and having regard to the detail set out in the Report of the Pyrite Panel (July 2012).

The Panel undertook a desktop study, in conjunction with a stakeholder consultation, to establish certain facts in relation to the potential exposure of pyrite in dwellings. The information was gathered from a number of sources including local authorities, structural guarantee providers, representatives of homeowners, private builders, construction professionals and public representatives and was cross referenced to verify, as far as practicable, its validity.

Seventy-four estates were identified to the Pyrite Panel, as possibly having pyrite. At that

time all of these estates were located in the five local authority areas of Dublin City, Fingal, Kildare, Meath and Offaly, although the scheme was subsequently amended in February 2015 in the light of relevant information that emerged in the local authority areas of Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown and South Dublin with regard to pyritic heave in a small number of housing developments, i.e. one development in each of the two local authority areas.

Any proposal to amend the scheme is, in the first instance, a matter for the Pyrite Resolution Board and any such proposal would require detailed consideration of the evidence. The recommendations of the Pyrite Panel, which informed the establishment of the pyrite remediation scheme, were premised on a number of pertinent factors. Similar factors would need to be examined by the Pyrite Resolution Board in advance of extending the scheme to other areas, given the scheme is ultimately one of last resort.

As a minimum, in order to consider the appropriateness or otherwise of amending the scheme, I understand that the Board would require a report addressing the following information: -

- the extent and severity of damage to dwellings in the local authority area caused by pyritic heave in the subfloor hardcore;
- verification, if available, that the damage has been caused by pyrite;
- the background to the occurrence of the damage;
- details of any structural warranty policies for the dwellings;
- the history of the estate's construction, numbers, type of dwellings etc;
- the source of the hardcore supplied to dwellings in the estate; and
- any supporting geological assessments.

In addition to the above, the Board may also make such further enquiries as it considers necessary in order to assist it in considering the matter. In this regard, it would be advisable for the residents to confirm the nature of the pyrite problems in the area, i.e. do the problems stem from reactive pyrite in the subfloor hardcore material which is giving rise to pyritic heave and consequential significant pyritic damage.

The Board may be contacted by phone at Lo call 1890 252842 or by email to info@pyrite-board.ie or alternatively at oireachtasinfo@pyriteboard.ie.

Library Services Staff

342. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the staffing request by Galway County Council to appoint a branch librarian at Ballygar Library, County Galway, will be approved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17162/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department received a staff sanction request from Galway County Council for a Branch Librarian, Ballygar, on 5 April 2018 and following consideration of the request, the post was approved on 16 April 2018.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

343. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of new local authority houses or voluntary houses built in Galway city and county respectively in each year since 2011; the number of private houses purchased for social housing purposes in this period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17182/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Through the supports made available from my Department, funding is available to all local authorities to deliver additional social housing stock through new construction projects, through the acquisition of new and previously owned houses/apartments and through working with approved housing bodies under a range of delivery options.

Details on the number of properties purchased and built in each local authority area, including Galway City and County local authorities, for letting to those on the social housing waiting lists, are available on my Department's website at the following link: www.housing.gov.ie/node/6338. Information on quarter four of 2017 will be published shortly.

Local Authority Housing Maintenance

344. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if funding provided by his Department to Kildare County Council to repair houses has been returned; and if so, the amount. [17191/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Section 58 of the Housing Act 1966 provides that the management and maintenance of local authority housing stock is a matter for each individual local authority in the first instance, including housing maintenance and repairs.

My Department does provide exchequer support to local authorities in respect of housing refurbishments in certain situations and, for example, in 2017 through the Voids Programme, Kildare County Council was assisted with around €200,000 in funding to refurbish 8 vacant/derelict social houses so they could be returned to productive use.

This funding was fully drawn down and I am not aware of any instance where funding has been returned by Kildare County Council to my Department under this programme.

Local Authority Housing

345. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme applications received to date by local authority area; the number of loans approved, declined and still under consideration, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17215/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): As with the previous local authority home loan offerings, the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan, which was introduced on 1 February 2018, 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 completed 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: 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; it is anticipated that Q4 data will be published shortly.

House Prices

346. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he has examined a report by an organisation (details supplied); his views on the projected 10% increase on housing prices in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17247/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): As the Deputy will be aware, chronic under-supply of housing across all tenures, for several years during the economic downturn, is at the heart of the significant challenges which exist in the housing sector. The residential construction sector in Ireland was severely impacted by the economic downturn, with housing output falling by almost 90% between 2006 and 2013.

The latest CSO Residential Property Price Index (RPPI), published on 12 April 2018, indicates that, while house prices are continuing to rise, the national index is 21.8% lower than its highest level in 2007. Dublin residential property prices are 23% lower than their February 2007 peak, while residential property prices in the Rest of Ireland are 27.5% lower than their May 2007 peak. Alternative measures available in this area from Daft.ie and MyHome.ie show similar but slightly lower trends. While these indices are based on asking prices, the CSO data is based on completed property transactions. For example, the latest Daft.ie report indicates that asking prices are increasing by 7.3% nationally and 8.4% in Dublin.

While the statistics in the various reports may differ somewhat, all reports point to a strong demand for housing, bolstered by economic recovery and falling unemployment. This is further evidenced in the draft Government's Stability Programme Update 2018 which was published by my colleague, the Minister for Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, earlier this week.

Under Rebuilding Ireland and in order to get overall house building at scale activated again, the Government has, inter alia:

- approved investment of €200 million in key enabling infrastructure to open up strategic public and private sites for early development;
- updated, streamlined and de-risked the planning and regulatory regime for houses and apartments; and
- announced arrangements for development finance to be made available to house builders.

There is clear evidence that Rebuilding Ireland is having a positive impact with all housing activity indicators continuing to show encouraging trends:

- Home builders have notified 18,500 new residential construction commencements over the twelve months to end February 2018, an increase of 41% year on year;
- Planning permission was granted for almost 20,800 new homes in 2017, an annual increase of 27%;

- The CSO's preliminary Quarterly National Accounts for 2017 showed a 33% growth in residential construction investment;

- Large scale residential developments are securing planning permission through the new Strategic Housing Development (SHD) process in An Bord Pleanála.

In addition, on 22 January, I announced a further package of affordability measures, including the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan, a new Affordable Purchase Scheme, and a focus on cost rental projects, full details of which can be accessed at <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/min-murphys-statement-on-affordable-homes/>.

While the housing market is complex, through the multiplicity of actions currently being progressed through Rebuilding Ireland to increase the supply of high quality homes to at least 25,000 per annum by 2020, the Government has created the conditions required for the restoration of a more sustainable and normally functioning housing market capable of providing homes, at affordable price points to buy or rent, where and when they are required.

Rental Sector

347. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the estimated number of units to be delivered in each of the pilot projects for a new cost rental scheme; the timeframe for their delivery; the criteria for their allocation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17297/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Against the background of the affordability pressures which currently exist in the rental market in certain areas, the Government is determined to make cost rental a major part of the Irish housing system, similar to the role it plays in many European countries. Under this approach, rents are set at levels to recover the construction costs and to facilitate the management and administration of developments, but with only a minimal profit margin included.

A pilot project is currently being progressed by Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, at Enniskerry Road, in conjunction with the Housing Agency and Approved Housing Bodies (AHB), using land owned by the Agency. Delivering 50 cost rental units, this pilot is providing very valuable learning to inform the wider roll out.

In terms of the timeline for delivery, like all publicly funded construction projects, the development of local authority sites for cost rental homes must comply with the Government's Capital Works Management Framework and procurement rules, the objectives of which are to ensure greater cost certainty, better value for money and financial accountability. However, planning permission is currently in place, and I expect the project to go to tender in the coming months with a site start later this year.

In tandem with this pilot project, my Department is working to design and deliver a major cost rental project close to the city centre of Dublin, most likely on a ready-to-go local authority owned site. I recently visited the European Investment Bank in Luxembourg, with a team from my Department, to discuss how the Bank could support such a project. Importantly, this support could be both financial and also through its advisory services, benefitting from the Bank's extensive international experience of affordable housing and cost rental projects.

I expect to be in a position to provide further detail on the ambitions around the delivery of affordable homes to buy and rent, as well as clarity on the eligibility and conditions relating to the new schemes, in the coming weeks.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

348. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of affordable purchase scheme units provided to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17298/18]

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. Following the economic downturn, with housing construction output dropping by 90%, the Government has taken remedial action to get Ireland building new homes again, culminating in the comprehensive Rebuilding Ireland – Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness in July 2016.

Rebuilding Ireland is having a significant impact, with nearly 26,000 households having their social housing needs met in 2017, significantly ahead of target. In order to get overall house-building at scale activated again, the Government has:

- approved investment of €200 million in key enabling infrastructure to open up strategic public and private sites for early development;

- updated, streamlined and de-risked the planning and regulatory regime to progress major houses and apartment developments; and

- approved arrangements for development finance to be made available to house builders.

In terms of housing output all housing activity indicators continue to show encouraging trends:

- Home builders have notified 18,500 new residential construction commencements over the twelve months to end-February 2018, an increase of 41% year on year;

- Planning permission was granted for almost 20,800 new homes in 2017, an annual increase of 27%;

- The CSO's preliminary Quarterly National Accounts for 2017 showed a 33% growth in residential construction investment;

- Large-scale residential developments are securing planning permission through the new Strategic Housing Development (SHD) process in An Bord Pleanála.

The Government is committed to ensuring that housing is affordable for households on low to moderate incomes. Recognising that people want a choice of affordable purchase and rental, depending on their stage of life and circumstances, we are progressing both.

Importantly, the new measures announced in January of this year are specifically targeted at delivering more affordable homes and have the potential to deliver more than 3,000 new affordable homes to buy or rent initially, with a target delivery of at least 10,000 new affordable homes in the medium to longer term. The emphasis will be on delivering affordable homes from the public land bank in urban areas where affordability issues are greatest. Recognising that there are enabling infrastructure requirements on some sites, I am also providing Exchequer funding of €25 million, over 2018 and 2019, as a key contribution towards the delivery of more affordable housing from local authority land.

In terms of affordable purchase, the new Scheme will be based on the relevant provisions

of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, which will be commenced shortly, and enabling regulations which are in preparation. At that point, the elected members of each local authority will be responsible for determining the order of priority to be accorded to eligible households, in line with the national scheme's framework. In the meantime, Dublin City Council has two major ready-to-go sites being advanced through procurement. The elected members of the City Council have determined that 20% of the homes on these sites - at Infirmaroy Road and Oscar Traynor Road - will be made available to eligible households for affordable purchase.

Thatching Grants Applications

349. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when a decision will be made on an application for a thatching grant by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17340/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department received an application last month for a thatching grant for the case in question. The assessment of such applications requires an inspection of the property, which will take place shortly. A decision will issue to the applicant shortly thereafter.

Local Authority Housing Provision

350. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the level of funding that will be provided to Monaghan County Council for 2018 in respect of housing construction, purchase of houses, upgrading of existing housing stock and funding for housing grant schemes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17341/18]

351. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the level of funding that will be provided to Cavan County Council for 2018 in respect of housing construction, purchase of houses, upgrading of existing housing stock and funding for housing grant schemes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17342/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 350 and 351 together.

In respect of delivering new social housing homes, whether through construction, acquisition or other approaches, no precise advance allocation of funding is made to individual local authorities. Instead, funding is drawn down by the local authorities, in line with the level of advancement they make in delivering new social housing. In that regard, I have issued social housing delivery targets to all local authorities which, in the case of Monaghan and Cavan County Councils for build, acquisition and leasing from 2018-21, are 226 and 335 respectively - further information is available at the following weblink: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-social-housing-delivery-targets-for-local-authorities-2018-2021/>. All local authorities, including Monaghan and Cavan, will be required to deliver against these targets and I have assured the Chief Executives that the funding is in place to support this delivery.

Funding is allocated on an annual basis in respect of a number of programmes to improve existing social housing stock. The Social Housing Energy Efficiency Retrofitting Programme improves energy efficiency and comfort levels in local authority homes, benefitting those at risk of fuel poverty and making a significant contribution to Ireland's carbon emissions reduction targets and energy efficiency targets for 2020. My Department will also shortly ask local

authorities, including Monaghan and Cavan County Councils, to submit details of their 2018 work proposals and related funding requirements for this programme.

Notification of the 2018 funding allocations to local authorities will issue shortly in respect of the funding programmes for Adaptations and Extensions to Social Housing Stock (Disabled Persons Grants, Extensions and Improvement Works in Lieu) and for the Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability, which is for private houses. Ahead of the specific 2018 allocations issuing, work under these programmes is continuing as local authorities can commit up to 65% of their 2017 allocation in approving applications for 2018. This interim funding provision comfortably allows local authorities to advance work under these programmes pending full year allocations for 2018 being confirmed shortly.

Finally my Department also provides funding to local authorities under the Voids Programme, to support their work in preparing vacant social homes for re-letting. In 2017, funding of €505,254 was provided to Monaghan County Council to return 38 vacant social homes to use while Cavan County Council received €303,112 to return 31 such homes to use. Local authorities, including Monaghan and Cavan, recently submitted the list of properties they wish to be included in the 2018 Voids Programme which are now being assessed and I expect to announce details shortly of their 2018 funding. Local authorities have been advised that they should not delay in carrying out the necessary refurbishment works on eligible units, while waiting for the assessment and allocations.

Tenant Purchase Scheme Review

352. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if improvements will be introduced at an early date to the tenant purchase scheme to enable Part V tenants and tenants in receipt of a social welfare payment who are in a financial position to purchase their homes to participate in this scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17343/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme came into operation on 1 January 2016. The Scheme is open to eligible tenants, including joint tenants, of local authority houses that are available for sale under the Scheme. To be eligible, tenants must meet certain criteria, including having a minimum reckonable income of €15,000 per annum and having been in receipt of social housing support for at least one year.

The minimum reckonable income for eligibility under the scheme is determined by the relevant local authority in accordance with the detailed provisions of the Ministerial Direction issued under Sections 24(3) and (4) of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014. In the determination of the minimum reckonable income, local authorities can include income from a number of different sources and classes, such as from employment, private pensions, maintenance payments and certain social welfare payments, including pensions, where the social welfare payment is secondary to employment income.

The minimum income criterion was introduced in order to ensure the sustainability of the scheme. Applicants must demonstrate that they have an income that is long-term and sustainable in nature. This ensures that the tenant purchasing the house is in a financial position, as the owner, to maintain and insure the property for the duration of the charged period, in compliance with the conditions of the order transferring the ownership of, and responsibility for, the house from the local authority to the tenant.

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The provisions of Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, are designed to enable the development of mixed tenure sustainable communities. Part V units are excluded from the Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme 2016 to ensure that units delivered under this mechanism will remain available for people in need of social housing support and that the original policy goals of the legislation are not eroded over time. The continued development of mixed tenure communities remains very important in promoting social integration.

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.

Arts Funding

353. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if special funding for a person (details supplied) will be granted; if a special funding scheme to support exceptionally talented young persons under 18 years of age will be investigated, with a view to its introduction; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17237/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): The Arts Council is the principal agency through which current funding is channelled to artists and arts organisations. The Arts Council provides funding for a number of bursaries including a Music bursary award to support professional artists to develop their art practice, although I understand that applicants are only eligible to apply for such funding on reaching 18. My Department will however refer the case to the Arts Council for advice.

The National Concert Hall also has a number of competitive bursaries. Relevant in this case is the 'Young Musicians Award for string players', which is a fund of €10,000 awarded every second year and which is open to players between the ages of 13 -17. Details of this award may be obtained from the National Concert Hall.

My colleague the Minister for Educational and Skills also operates a number of scholarships and bursaries for students studying abroad and may be aware of supports from which assistance could be provided.