

## Written Answers.

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

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*Questions Nos. 1 to 12, inclusive, answered orally.*

### Financial Services Regulation

13. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he is satisfied that there is an adequate and fair independent appeals mechanism in a bank (details supplied) in relation to a group; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21454/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** It is a matter for the Central Bank to oversee the operation of regulated financial service providers in Ireland. That said, I have contacted Ulster Bank about its complaints process in relation to Global Restructuring Group.

Ulster Bank have confirmed that following on from the UK Financial Conduct Authority's (FCA) appointment of a Skilled Person to undertake a review, Royal Bank of Scotland in an agreement with the FCA, announced two measures in November 2016:

- a Global Restructuring Group complaints process, overseen by an Independent Third Party - Sir William Blackburne, a retired UK High Court Judge, and
- a voluntary automatic refund of complex fees paid by customers in Global Restructuring Group during the period between 2008 and 2013

Ulster Bank advised that they have identified all of their customers who are eligible for a refund of the complex fees which were paid to the Bank and have either processed their refund or contacted the customers for further information to facilitate the refund payment.

Ulster Bank have been addressing the complaints received from their customers and these are now being assessed through Ulster Banks Global Restructuring Group complaints process. If any of these customers are unhappy with the bank's decision, they will have the opportunity to refer their complaint to the Independent Third Party.

Ulster Bank have a specific listing of Global Restructuring Group Frequently Asked Questions which will help customers to understand if they are in scope for the Global Restructuring Group complaints process, means by which they can make a complaint, and how these complaints will be handled under Consumer Protection Codes and SME Regulations.

Ulster Bank Ireland DAC has voluntarily fully participated in this process.

### Construction Industry

14. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Finance if an increase to the payment of country money (details supplied) in line with the consumer price index will be examined; when the working group on construction is due to meet; if representatives from his Department will attend and examine the issue at a meeting of the group; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21236/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The exact rate of travel time allowances, or ‘country money’, paid in the construction sector is an issue to be dealt with in the normal course of industrial relations, either at a company level between employers and unions, or through the usual industrial relations mechanisms available. Indeed, in 2017, the Labour Court chose not to recommend the inclusion of a travel time allowance in the Sectoral Employment Order relating to the construction sector.

A healthy, sustainable, competitive and well-functioning construction industry that offers good quality long-term employment and construction output is essential to the achievement of the goals of the National Development Plan. In order to help facilitate the development of such an industry, the establishment of a construction sector group was announced as part of the National Development Plan.

The group will ensure regular and open dialogue between Government and the construction sector. The group is now in the process of being established with all details yet to be fully finalised, including its remit, membership and date of the first meeting. I expect the Group will facilitate an exchange of views and an engagement between the various parties on how the industry can grow in a sustainable manner and play a crucial role in achieving the priorities as set out in the National Development Plan.

### **Tax Compliance**

15. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 110 of 27 March 2018, the premises the Revenue Commissioners inspected; the findings and outcome regarding breeders that fall outside the scope of the Dog Breeding Establishments Act 2011; and the relevant tax paid. [21438/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Section 9 of the Dog Breeding Establishments Act 2010 provides that each local authority must maintain a register of dog breeding establishments located in its area of responsibility. The Act also places an obligation on any person seeking to operate a dog breeding establishment to have the premises included on the register. The commencement order for the Dog Breeding Establishments Act 2010 was signed by the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government on 21 December 2011 and the Act came into force on 1 January 2012. Local Authorities are responsible for the implementation of the Act. As previously advised to the Deputy, Revenue does not have any role to play under the Dog Breeding Establishments Act and is not involved in inspecting relevant establishments to ensure compliance with the legislation.

As regards taxation, the profits of any dog breeding business are liable to tax irrespective of whether it is included on a register of dog breeding establishments or not. The Deputy will be aware from my reply to Parliamentary Question No. 110 of 27 March 2018 that Revenue examined a number of dog breeding establishments as part of its 2017 compliance programme. Revenue has confirmed that most of the businesses involved were found to be tax compliant, with enquiries still ongoing in a small number of cases. However, taxpayer confidentiality provisions contained in section 851A of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 precludes Revenue from providing any further information in regard to the cases examined or providing any information

that could identify them. The section formalises taxpayer confidentiality and specifically prohibits unauthorised disclosure of taxpayer information.

In addition to administering the tax and duties system, Revenue enforces a range of restrictions and product safety regimes on behalf of other State Agencies at the point of import and export. One such example is the work Revenue does with bodies like the Dublin Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (DSPCA) and it has achieved some notable successes as part of this joint working initiative. Revenue collaborated closely with DSPCA and other agencies in Operation Delphin, to disrupt the illegal cross-border trade in pups. During 2017, Revenue took custody of 33 pups being transported without pet passports and not microchipped, as required under the Animal Health and Welfare Act, 2013. All were passed to the DSPCA to be cared for.

On 8 May 2018, Revenue officers at Dublin Port took custody of four dogs, including three pups, when they stopped and questioned a UK national, in routine operations. The man was travelling to the UK, and did not have pet passports for the dogs, nor were the pups microchipped as required under the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013. The dogs were transferred into the care of the DSPCA, where they are receiving veterinary attention.

### European Council Meetings

16. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if he will report on his attendance at the ECOFIN meeting on 28 April 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21287/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The meeting I attended on 28 April 2018 was the scheduled Informal Meeting of Economic and Finance Ministers held under the auspices of the Bulgarian Presidency in Sofia. These meetings occur twice a year - held in the country of the rotating Presidency. They are designed to allow participants to come together to discuss items of topical or potential interest in a less formal atmosphere with a view to possible orientation for future work.

I was accompanied to the event by the Governor of the Central Bank of Ireland who attended the Friday Working Sessions.

I also availed of the opportunity to have bilateral exchanges with colleagues.

On the first day there were separate lunches for the Ministers and Central Bank Governors.

At the Ministerial lunch we addressed the topic of Deepening of EMU with a particular focus on the Roadmap on completing Banking Union in view of the pending June European Council and Euro Area Summit. The Eurogroup President updated Ministers on current work on the reform of the European Stability Mechanism - also to feature at the June European Council/Euro Area Summit. He also took the opportunity to inform Ministers of matters discussed that morning at the Eurogroup meeting.

The first Working Session covered the topic of Convergence in the EU – Inside and outside the Euro Area and was supplemented by a paper prepared by the Centre for European Policy Studies. As part of that session we also addressed the issue of Further reducing fragmentation within the Capital Markets Union - this time assisted by a contribution from Bruegel - a Brussels based “think-tank”. Under a Miscellaneous Item a debrief of the 19-20 March meeting of G20 Ministers and Central Bank Governors meeting in Buenos Aires was provided by the Presidency.

The second day's sessions were dominated by discussions on tax matters where Ministers addressed the topics of Towards a common agenda for modern tax administrations: Improving revenue collection and fighting tax fraud in the single market and A renewed approach for the corporate taxation in the Single Market and tax challenges of the digitalisation of the economy.

### **Tax Reliefs Application**

17. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance his plans in respect of reforming the capacity of bailed out banks to offset their historic losses against tax bills; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21289/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Corporation Tax Loss Relief is provided for by Section 396 of the Taxes Consolidation Act (TCA) 1997. It allows for losses incurred in the course of business to be accounted for when calculating a business' tax liabilities. Loss relief for corporation tax is a long standing feature of the Irish Corporate Tax system and is a standard feature of Corporation Tax systems in all OECD countries.

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

Section 396C was repealed to reduce the State's role as a 'backstop' provider of capital and to protect the existing value of the State's equity and debt investments. With the removal of Section 396C, AIB and BOI were restored to the same position as other Irish corporates including other Irish banks which effectively levelled the playing field.

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

There would be a material negative impact on the valuation of the States investments from any change in tax treatment of accumulated losses where the banks are concerned. It is critically important to understand that the State is actually getting value today from these tax losses through our share sales.

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

At Committee Stage of Finance Act 2017, I agreed that my officials would produce a report on the effect of limiting tax reliefs on losses carried forward for banks, with the stipulation that the policy outlook I will adhere to is the maintenance of the bank levy. It is envisaged that this report will be submitted to the FinPer Committee in June 2018.

### **Banking Sector Remuneration**

18. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Finance when the report on bankers' pay will be published; the person or body authorising same; if it will make recommendations on the future of the super tax on bonuses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21448/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As the Deputy is aware Government policy on banking remuneration has remained unchanged since the financial crisis. Extensive restrictions are in place, which, in summary, limit total remuneration for staff in AIB, Bank of Ireland and PTSB to €500,000 (excluding a standard pension contribution). Policy also dictates that bonuses and many other benefits cannot be paid to any staff. This policy impacts c. 23,000 workers across the three banks.

The Deputy will be further aware that I recently acknowledged that it is possible, in the future, that the context for bank pay could change; things are changing in the economy, Brexit is on the horizon and that will likely bring with it more intense competition for talent across the sector.

We are also likely to see more companies moving into Ireland, in the coming years, who will not be subject to the restrictions in the way that some of our banks are. With our economy almost back to full employment, the environment in which all of the companies who are based here operate has altered, and will continue to change. It is important that the right policies are in place to ensure a competitive but also a fair playing field.

For that reason, I have initiated a review of bank remuneration policy so that I can determine whether or not the bank pay policy that is in place is fit for purpose.

This will be done through the procurement of an external consultant to advise me on how policy in this area might best be developed in the future.

The review, I expect, will take most of the year to complete, and irrespective of what that outcome is, and what advice is given on the reintroduction of bonuses, the 'super tax', which sees 89% of bonuses being paid back to the State will remain in place. The power to alter that remains exclusively in the hands of the Oireachtas.

### **Summer Economic Statement**

19. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance when the summer economic statement will be published; if the statement can be published in June 2018 to permit more effective pre-budget scrutiny by the Select Committee on Budgetary Oversight and other committees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21383/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The publication of the Summer Economic Statement (SES), forms a key part of the reformed budgetary process designed to complement the Stability Programme Update (SPU). Underpinned by the macroeconomic outlook set out in April as part of the SPU, the SES will broadly set out what the Government believes to be the appropriate fiscal policy for the year to come, taking into account Ireland's stage in the economic cycle.

Whilst the economy is forecast to continue to grow strongly over the coming years, the SES will reflect the need to avoid any policy measures which could contribute to overheating in the economy. As a small open economy we are exposed to a number of external risks, particularly in relation to Brexit, changes in the international tax landscape and rising geopolitical tensions, all of which have the potential to destabilise our economy. The Government is cognisant of these risks and recognises the need to plan for the future and manage our resources in a prudent

fashion. Given the uncertainty we face over the coming years we need to continue to focus on enhancing our competitiveness and building up resilience in our public finances.

The SES is designed to facilitate a discussion of the options available in advance of the Budget in October. The scrutiny provided by the Budget Oversight Committee and other Committees form an important role in these budgetary considerations and I look forward to engaging with the relevant Committees as part of this process.

I aim to publish the SES in the summer to allow sufficient time for these Committees to complete their work.

### **Ministerial Meetings**

20. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Finance if he will report on his meeting with Mr. Klaus Regling, Managing Director of the European Stability Mechanism on 8 May 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21376/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I met with the Managing Director of the European Stability Mechanism (ESM), Klaus Regling, on Tuesday, 8 May 2018. We had a positive and constructive discussion on a number of issues including the Irish economy and the future of the Economic and Monetary Union, with a focus on the future role of the ESM.

Mr. Regling noted that Ireland's economic recovery since the crisis is 'remarkable'. I updated him on recent developments which highlight the robust recovery and strong performance of the economy. I also outlined some of the more pressing challenges that need to be monitored and managed carefully. We discussed Brexit and its potential impact on the Irish economy, the ongoing necessity for investment in infrastructure such as housing and transport, and the legacy issue of non-performing loans which continues to impact the banking sector.

In relation to Europe, we agreed on the need to continue to strengthen the economic and monetary union, and reviewed the possible development of the ESM in that context.

The creation of the ESM was one of the key euro area reforms after the crisis and it has proven itself to be a very effective and efficient institution. Four of the five countries that received loans from the ESM, or its predecessor, the European Financial Stability Facility, have now successfully ended their programmes, and have among the highest growth rates in the euro area. As part of the EU-IMF Programme of Financial Assistance, Ireland was also a beneficiary of the European Financial Stability Facility. Officials from the ESM therefore continue to visit Ireland on a twice-yearly basis, participating in Post-Programme surveillance reviews for the purpose of its Early Warning System. The ninth review is taking place this week.

Discussions on the future role and remit of the ESM include a review of the ESM lending toolkit and whether the ESM should play a greater role in programme design and monitoring in the future. The potential development of the role of the ESM of course requires careful consideration and deliberation and work is ongoing, at both technical and political level, in advance of the June European Council at which EU Heads of State of Government will reflect further on deepening the economic and monetary union.

### **Motor Insurance Coverage**

21. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the policy of some insurance companies which refuse to insure vehicles that are over ten years old; his plans

to address the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21386/18]

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

However, neither the Minister for Finance, nor I, nor the Central Bank of Ireland can interfere in the provision or pricing of insurance products, as these matters are of a commercial nature, and are determined by insurance companies based on an assessment of the risks they are willing to accept. This position is reinforced by the EU framework for insurance which expressly prohibits Member States from adopting rules which require insurance companies to obtain prior approval of the pricing or terms and conditions of insurance products. Consequently, neither the Minister nor I is in a position to direct insurance companies as to the pricing level or terms or conditions that they should apply in respect of particular categories of vehicles.

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

Notwithstanding the above, Departmental officials have continued to engage with Insurance Ireland in relation to the availability and cost of insurance for older cars, and have been informed that certain insurance providers have recently changed their acceptance criteria and increased their vehicle age threshold levels in this regard.

Finally, under the terms of the Declined Cases Agreement, the insurance market will not refuse to provide insurance to an individual seeking insurance if the person has approached at least three insurers and has not been able to obtain cover from them. In this regard, there are further details available on the Insurance Ireland website while the relevant e-mail address is: *declined@insuranceireland.eu*

## Fiscal Data

22. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated size of the increased fiscal space available in 2019 based on the stability programme update April 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21382/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Summer Economic Statement 2018 will update the figures on available parameters for Budget 2019 taking into consideration the publication of the European Commission's Spring Economic Forecast. These parameters will account for all policy changes introduced since Budget 2018.

The Stability Programme Update 2018 set out pre-committed expenditure of €2.6 billion for next year. This consisted of:

- €1.5 billion (National Development Plan related)
- €0.4 billion (to provide for demographic costs)
- €0.4 billion (to provide for the public sector pay agreement)

- €0.3 billion (to provide for carryover costs next year of measures that were introduced in the budget for this year).

This expenditure leads to a projected deficit of 0.1 per cent of GDP forecast for next year.

The resources available will become clearer within the next couple of weeks. However, any tax/expenditure package that goes beyond €2.6 billion will necessarily involve additional borrowing (i.e. the deficit would be greater than the 0.1 per cent that is currently projected)

Finally, as I have stated on numerous occasions, the Government will make policy based on what is right for the economy. At a time when we are approaching full employment, it is essential that Government budgetary policy does not repeat the pro-cyclical mistakes of the past and risk jeopardising the sustainability of our public finances and future living standards.

### **Ministerial Meetings**

23. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Finance if he has met the CEOs of the Irish banks recently. [19095/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As the Deputy is aware I have regular meetings with the CEOs of the banks in which the State has a shareholding in addition to the other non Irish owned retail banks operating in the Irish market.

I met formally with the CEO of Bank of Ireland in March of this year and the CEO's of AIB and PTSB last month during which a broad range of banking matters were discussed including the economic outlook, new lending in support of the economy, the tracker mortgage examination, progress in dealing with non-performing loans and initiatives in support of customers in difficulty.

I note that the banks in which the State has an investment continue to make good progress thanks to the continued improvement in the economy. All three banks are now generating profits and the rate of the regulatory capital build is encouraging as shown in their full year 2017 financial results. In the case of AIB and Bank of Ireland both recently released positive trading updates for Q1 2018 which highlight strong profitability, capital generation, continued loan book growth and further reductions in Non- Performing Exposures or NPEs. Ptsb released a trading update this morning which showed further progress in meeting its medium term objectives.

The ongoing Tracker Mortgage Examination is also a topic which I have discussed with the CEOs of each of the banks, and the most recent update from the Central Bank indicated significant progress has been made by each of the banks with 88% of impacted customers having been identified and received offers of redress and compensation with the remaining 12% expected to receive offers by end-June 2018.

I am also aware that other Ministers have met the CEOs of some of the banks recently including my colleague Michael Creed the Minister for Agriculture who discussed the impact of the prolonged winter on some individual farmers cash flow as well as the shortage of fodder in the sector.

### **EU Budget Contribution**

24. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Finance the way in which he will

16 May 2018

ensure Ireland receives a fair return on its EU contribution in the coming years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21449/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As the Deputy will be aware, the European Commission's proposal for the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021-2027 was published on 2 May 2018. I welcome publication of the proposals which marks the start of an important debate on the future of the EU Budget.

The proposals come at a time of great change and adjustment for the EU; with new priorities (migration, security, climate change etc) and the departure of UK, the EU Budget needs to remain relevant.

As the Deputy will also be aware, with Ireland's growing prosperity we have moved from being a net beneficiary to a net contributor to the EU budget. As such, it is important that the next MFF be an appropriately sized spending plan for the EU27 in a post-Brexit era, and that it will be capable of meeting EU 27 priorities. Negotiations on those priorities and how they should be funded will be complex.

It will be important that traditional policies – with demonstrated value – continue to be properly supported in addition to the newer priorities. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) remains a priority for Ireland. Cohesion also remains important, especially for less developed Member States.

We welcome the continued emphasis in the Commission's proposals on other policies which function well: Erasmus+, the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, PEACE and Interreg programmes and the EU's global instruments.

The Commission's proposals are detailed and will require careful examination over the coming period, particularly as further details emerge. All relevant Government Departments will examine the full package carefully to understand the overall implications for Ireland.

An Inter-Departmental group has been established which includes relevant Departments, chaired by my Department, with a lead role from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. This group will feed into consideration at senior official level and at Cabinet level to develop an appropriate approach for Ireland to take in the MFF negotiations. Ireland will also engage constructively with European partners on these proposals. These arrangements will be kept under review as the pace of negotiations intensifies.

### **Motor Insurance Costs**

25. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to deal with the rising cost of motor insurance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21168/18]

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

However, it is acknowledged that pricing in the motor insurance sector has been subject to a lot of volatility in recent years and, indeed, the problem of rising motor insurance premiums was the main impetus for the establishment of the Cost of Insurance Working Group. Its Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance was published in January 2017. The Report makes 33 recom-

recommendations with 71 associated actions to be carried out in agreed timeframes, set out within an Action Plan.

Work is ongoing on the implementation of the recommendations by the relevant Government Departments and Agencies and there is a commitment within the Report that the Working Group will prepare quarterly updates on its progress. The fifth such update was published on 11 May and shows that of the 50 separate deadlines set to date within the Action Plan, 40 have been met. Substantial work has also been undertaken in respect of the nine action points categorised as “ongoing”.

It should be noted that the most recent CSO data (for April 2018) indicates that private motor insurance premiums have decreased by 19% since peaking in July 2016. While the CSO statistics indicate a greater degree of stability on an overall basis, these figures represent a broad average and therefore I appreciate many people may still be seeing increases. However, I am hopeful that the improved stability in pricing will be maintained and that premiums should continue to fall from the very high levels of mid-2016.

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

### Tax Data

26. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance the number of SPVs registered here in each of the past three years; the amount of tax paid by these companies; the amount of tax foregone due to particular tax breaks for SPVs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21489/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** It is assumed that by SPVs the Deputy is referring to companies who have submitted notifications to Revenue that there are qualifying companies for the purposes of section 110 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (TCA) (known as “section 110” companies). Section 110 sets out a regime for the taxation of special purpose companies set up to securitise assets.

Securitisation is the process by which finance is raised in capital markets based on the intrinsic credit strength of assets or other sources of cash flow, independent of the creditworthiness of the original owner of the assets. Securitisation is an integral part of the global financial services industry. Its importance has been recognised by the European Commission through their work on Capital Markets Union, of which one of the aims is to seek to build a sustainable securitisation regime across the European Union.

I am informed by Revenue that the number of notifications received by Revenue from companies that are “qualifying companies” for the purposes of section 110 of the TCA since 1 January 2015 is as follows:

Year	Number of Notifications Received
2015	423
2016	477
2017	759
Year to 30 April 2018	171

Year	Number of Notifications Received
Total	1,830

The amount of tax paid by section 110 companies in each of the years 2015 to 2017 is as follows:

	2015 €m	2016 €m	2017 €m
Corporation Tax	65	199	128
Value Added Tax	16.4	11.2	14.8
Payroll taxes	1.4	3.4	2.3

It is not possible to calculate the amount of tax that would have been payable by such companies had the section 110 regime not existed as the information necessary to determine this is not required to be returned to Revenue.

### Financial Services Regulation

27. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which he directly or through the aegis of the Central Bank has prepared plans to ensure that unregulated third parties acting on behalf of lenders are obliged to comply with regulations that take into account the efforts of borrowers (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21450/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Deputy has referred to unregulated third parties acting on behalf of lenders and possible plans to ensure that such third parties are obliged to comply with regulations including Codes of Conduct.

Government policy has been that the sale of a loan book should not result in a loss of protections for borrowers. The Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing Firms) Act 2015 restored protections to borrowers by making credit servicing a regulated activity and requiring firms which undertook credit servicing to be authorised by the Central Bank. Under the Act, purchasers of these loan books must either be regulated by the Central Bank themselves or else the loans must be serviced by a credit servicing firm who is regulated by the Central Bank.

The Act also prevented loan owners giving instructions to credit servicing firms which would be prohibited if the owner was regulated and also prohibited the credit servicing firm from implementing such instructions. Therefore, it is not possible for unregulated entities to act on behalf of lenders.

Regulated credit servicing firms and other regulated entities must comply with all relevant requirements of financial services legislation, including the regulatory requirements set out in the Central Bank's statutory Codes of Conduct and Regulations. These requirements include the Consumer Protection Code 2012 and the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears 2013.

I should also say that a customer who has a complaint against a regulated financial service provider which is not resolved by the provider's internal complaints mechanism may make a complaint to the independent Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman.

The Deputy may also be aware of a recent Private Member's Bill which would require the regulation of loan owners. The Government supports the intent behind the Bill and has com-

mitted to assisting the Deputy in improving the Bill to make it more effective.

### **Real Estate Investment Trusts**

28. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance if all information with regard to tax foregone by REITs since their establishment will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21492/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs) are collective investment vehicles designed to hold rental investment properties in a tax neutral manner. They are focused on long-term holding of income-producing property as opposed to short term speculative gains.

The function of the REIT framework is not to provide an overall tax exemption, but rather to facilitate collective investment in rental property by providing the same after-tax returns to investors as direct investment in rental property and removing a double layer of taxation at corporate and shareholder level which would otherwise apply.

In general, trading profits of Irish companies are subject to Corporation Tax (CT) at the rate of 12.5% and rental profits are subject to CT at 25%. In contrast, rental profits arising in a REIT are exempt from CT, provided the REIT distributes at least 85% of its property income each year, for taxation at the level of the investor. While most property disposals by a REIT will not give rise to Capital Gains Tax (CGT), where a REIT disposes of a newly developed property within 3 years of completion of the development, CGT will arise. Other profits earned by the REIT are subject to CT in the normal way.

Dividend Withholding Tax (DWT) at 20% is levied upon distributions by a REIT. An Irish resident individual can claim a credit for this DWT against his or her income tax liabilities while a non-resident investor may be able to claim a full or partial refund of DWT under a double tax agreement. Pension schemes, life assurance companies, charities or NAMA may receive distribution gross subject to the completion of valid declaration.

As such, the estimated cost attached to the REIT relates not to an exemption from tax, but rather to the move from direct taxation of rental income to the taxation of dividends distributed from REIT profits arising from that rental income. The extent of any net tax cost of the REIT exemptions will therefore be the difference between the tax which would have arisen on the property income in non-REIT ownership, and the tax charged on the dividends paid out of that property income by the REIT to their investors.

Any potential loss of tax relating to foreign investors is due to the difference between how company dividends are taxed in the hands of foreign investors compared to how profits from direct ownership of property are taxed. Ireland, in line with most countries, retains the right to tax profits arising from land and buildings in the State, regardless of where the owner is located. In contrast, taxing rights for dividends are usually divided between countries, based on tax treaty agreements. In general, Ireland allows for dividends of Irish companies to be paid to shareholders resident in treaty partner countries without any liability to Irish tax. This is because tax should already have been paid on the company's profits in Ireland the dividends are paid out of the after-tax profits of the company and the dividends received will form part of the shareholder's income for tax purposes in their country of residence.

In the absence of any other provisions, foreign REIT shareholders would not have had any liability to Irish tax on REIT dividends, despite the fact that the REIT itself benefits from a tax exemption on qualifying profits of the rental business. In order to ensure that tax from foreign

investors is retained, a Dividend Withholding Tax (DWT) at the standard rate of tax (currently 20%) was legislated for to specifically apply to REIT dividends. Foreign investors from treaty resident countries may be able to reclaim some part of this DWT if the relevant tax treaty allows for this. The taxation of dividends varies from treaty to treaty, but commonly a source State would retain the right to approximately 15% tax on dividends paid from that State.

I am informed by Revenue that their obligation to observe confidentiality for taxpayer information, and the small group of taxpayers involved, precludes them from providing more specific information.

### **Revenue Commissioners Data**

29. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance the number of assessments conducted by the Revenue Commissioners investigating false self-employment; the number of investigations that found against the employer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21300/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by Revenue that tackling shadow economy activity continues to be one of its key priorities.

As part of its compliance programme, Revenue works in co-operation with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) and the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) to pursue employers engaged in the misclassification of employees as self-employed individuals.

In 2017, Revenue identified 199 businesses that were not, but should have been, registered with Revenue for PAYE purposes and, following Revenue's intervention, those businesses were registered for PAYE purposes. The figures for 2015 and 2016 were 112 businesses and 216 businesses respectively.

Also during 2017, Revenue identified 1,912 individuals who were not, but should have been, registered with Revenue as employees for PAYE purposes and, following Revenue's intervention, they were correctly registered as employees for PAYE purposes. The figures for 2015 and 2016 were 1,364 individuals and 2,073 individuals respectively.

Finally, 485 individuals were reclassified from self-employment to employees. The figures for 2015 and 2016 were 365 individuals and 529 individuals respectively.

### **Corporation Tax Regime**

30. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he will amend the tax code in budget 2019 in order that the bailed out banks will commence paying corporation tax by introducing a 25% cap on losses that can be carried forward and a ten-year time limit in which losses must be used up. [21434/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Corporation Tax Loss Relief is provided for by Section 396 of the Taxes Consolidation Act (TCA) 1997. It allows for losses incurred in the course of business to be accounted for when calculating a business' tax liabilities. Loss relief for corporation tax is a long standing feature of the Irish Corporate Tax system and is a standard feature of Corporation Tax systems in all OECD countries.

Section 396C of the TCA 1997 previously restricted losses for NAMA participating institu-

tions to offset losses against 50% of taxable profits in a given year. At the time of its introduction the Government had limited involvement in the banking system. However, by Finance Bill 2013, this measure was considered to have outlasted its initial purpose as, due to the substantial holdings that the State had by that time acquired in the banking sector (99.8% AIB and 15% of Bank of Ireland at the time), the restriction was deemed to be acting against the State's interests.

Section 396C was repealed to reduce the State's role as a 'backstop' provider of capital and to protect the existing value of the State's equity and debt investments. With the removal of Section 396C, AIB and BOI were restored to the same position as other Irish corporates including other Irish banks which effectively levelled the playing field.

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

There would be a material negative impact on the valuation of the State's investments from any change in tax treatment of accumulated losses where the banks are concerned. It is critically important to understand that the State is actually getting value today from these tax losses through our share sales.

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

At Committee Stage of Finance Act 2017, I agreed that my officials would produce a report on the effect of limiting tax reliefs on losses carried forward for banks, with the stipulation that the policy outlook I will adhere to is the maintenance of the bank levy. It is envisaged that this report will be submitted to the FinPer Committee in June 2018.

### **NAMA Social Housing Provision**

31. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to co-operate with the Minister of Housing, Planning and Local Government with a view to using the remaining land NAMA has control of to build social and affordable housing; if he will direct NAMA to cease selling land it controls under section 14 of the National Asset Management Agency Act 2009; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21447/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** 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. 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 prohibiting the sale of their property. To do so would breach the borrower's property rights protected under Article 43 of the Constitution.

Therefore, I cannot accede to your request to use my powers under the NAMA Act in this instance, as I am advised that such a direction is not one lawfully open to me in the current circumstances.

However, based on Part V planning requirements, it is estimated that up to 720 social housing units were delivered by NAMA since 2014. Under Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2010, 10% of the properties must be provided to local authorities for social and affordable housing. 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 NAMA has delivered 2,474 units 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.

### **Stability and Growth Pact**

32. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance if problems with the common applied methodology have been raised at EU level; the response he has received from the Commission and Council of Ministers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21381/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Department continues to use the EU harmonised methodology to estimate the level of potential output as it is the legally binding reference method used by the Commission for assessment of Member State's compliance with the Stability and Growth Pact. However, to the extent that the harmonised methodology can be characterised as a "one size fits all" approach for estimating potential output, it can produce estimates that are problematic when applied to Ireland.

In this regard, when issues with the methodology manifest themselves, the Department proactively engages with the European Commission to devise solutions that ensure potential output estimates remain plausible. For example, potential output estimates have been insulated from the 2015 GDP and capital stock distortions reported in the 2015 National Income and Expenditure accounts. Similarly, in the context of the Stability Programme Update (SPU) 2018, model adjustments were agreed with the Commission to account for distortions in the 2017 GDP estimate associated with contract manufacturing.

Furthermore, the Department actively contributes at a technical level in Europe through the Output Gap Working Group, which is chaired by a senior Department official, to improve the performance of the harmonised methodology.

Notwithstanding improvements to the methodology, the Department has developed a number of alternative statistical models to assist in its assessment of the medium term growth potential of the Ireland's economy and its cyclical position over the short term, results of which have been summarised in Chapter 9 of the SPU 2018. This work is in conjunction with the application of the European Commission's harmonised production function approach. These results, along with other economic indicators, are considered by the Department when assessing the cyclical position of the economy.

### **State Claims Agency Data**

33. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of claims pending against the State Claims Agency to date by claim type, category and county in which the claimant is based; if there is transparency between the State Claims Agency and the delegated State authorities regarding the way in which individual cases are being managed; if delegated State authorities are informed of the details on cases that are being taken by the agency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21285/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am informed by the State Claims Agency (SCA) that as of 4 May 2018, there were 10,447 active claims recorded on the National Incident Management System (NIMS). NIMS is an IT system which is hosted by the SCA for the HSE, other Healthcare enterprises and Delegated State Authorities, and is used to manage and report on incidents and active claims.

These 10,447 active claims are broken down by incident/hazard category, and include:

- 3,163 related to clinical care;
- 6,586 related to exposure to various types of hazards (i.e. biological, physical and psychological);
- 487 related to crash/collision;
- 202 related to property damage/loss;
- 9 uncategorised, awaiting investigation.

NIMS does not collate data on the county in which claimants are based.

As the Deputy may be aware, the SCA has a statutory remit to manage personal injury claims, including claims in respect of clinical negligence, on behalf of Delegated State Authorities (DSAs), which include the Health Service Executive. When managing cases on behalf of DSAs, the SCA engages with DSAs to carry out investigations and to establish the facts of the cases. The SCA engages with DSAs on an on-going basis throughout a case in this respect, and the SCA provides regular information to DSAs in respect of their claims portfolios.

The SCA is statutorily mandated to determine the claims management strategy on the claims it manages on behalf of DSAs. The SCA's claims management objective is, while acting in the best interest of taxpayers in matters of personal injury and property damage litigation, to act fairly, ethically and compassionately in its dealings with people who have suffered injuries and/or damage and who take legal actions against the State or State bodies, and their families. In cases where the SCA investigation concludes that the relevant State authority bears some or all liability, it seeks to settle claims expeditiously and on fair and reasonable terms, while seeking to in no way exacerbate the suffering of those citizens. If it considers that the State is not liable, the SCA's policy is to defend the claims.

### **Customs and Excise Controls**

34. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Finance the steps he has taken to date and plans to take in preparation for post-Brexit customs checks at ports here specifically Rosslare Europort; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21404/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The precise customs arrangements that will apply after Brexit in all locations, including Rosslare Europort, will depend on the outcome of negotiations between the EU and UK. Similar to other Government agencies and

Departments, Revenue is actively engaged in examining a range of scenarios within the context of the Government's contingency planning, which is being undertaken within the whole-of-Government framework led by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. I am informed by Revenue that at this juncture it is not possible to assess what specific arrangements would be required in a post Brexit environment and what type or level of customs checks would be required. However, I am advised that Revenue are currently working on their customs IT infrastructure to ensure they may be prepared for an increase in customs declarations should this be required, and I am further advised that this work is progressing well.

### **Community Banking**

35. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Finance when the public banking report compiled by his Department and the Department of Rural and Community Development will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21377/18]

40. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to adopt the Sparkassen model of public banking as presented by an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21477/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 35 and 40 together.

The Programme for a Partnership Government contains a commitment to “thoroughly investigate the German Sparkassen model for the development of local public banks that operate within well-defined regions”. My Department, along with the Department of Rural and Community Development, are responsible for fulfilling this commitment.

Local public banking is where a State, or other public body, has ownership of a financial institution. In Germany, local public banks, called Sparkassen, are only permitted to operate in specific geographic regions. The business model of Sparkassen is not to maximise profits, but rather promote economic development and financial inclusion in the particular regional area in which they operate. In terms of SME finance, Sparkassen tend to build close relationships with SMEs in their locality.

The investigation of local public banking has consisted of a consultation process engaging with stakeholders and interested parties. This consultation process was carried out last year by the Department of Rural and Community Development, assisted by the Department of Finance.

Additionally, there has also been detailed consideration of a proposal put forward by Irish Rural Link and the Savings Banks Foundation for International Cooperation (SBFIC), the international development wing of the Sparkassen group. The proposal outlines a potential model of local public banking, based on the German model, in Ireland. There have been a number of meetings between officials in both Departments and representatives from Irish Rural Link and SBFIC.

Officials in my Department and the Department of Community and Rural Development have been working closely together. They have now completed the report on the findings of their investigation and both I, and my colleague, the Minister for Rural and Community Development, Michael Ring T.D., have received this report. We expect to be in a position to bring the joint report on the investigation of local public banking to Government for approval in the coming weeks.

The Deputies may be interested to know that there are already significant Government mea-

asures in place to support access to finance by Irish SMEs. These include the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI), the Supporting SMEs Online Tool, the Microenterprise Loan Fund, Local Enterprise Offices, the Credit Review Office and the Credit and Counter Guarantee Schemes.

Additionally, my Department is working with other Government departments to develop tailored and innovative schemes to meet the evolving needs of Irish SMEs, such as the Agricultural Cashflow Support Loan Scheme and the Brexit Loan Scheme I announced in Budgets 2017 and 2018 respectively.

### **Tax Yield**

36. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance the reason tax revenue was below profile in the first quarter of 2018; if there are difficulties with the tax forecast model which contributed to overestimates of income tax projections in the past; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21384/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Tax revenue was below profile by just 1.2 per cent (€141 million) to end-quarter one 2018, contributed to by some small shortfalls across a number of headings. Furthermore, tax revenues to end-March are showing strong year-on-year growth of 3.5 per cent or €401 million.

It is important to point out that it is still too early in the tax collection calendar to discern any firm trends, which in turn underpins the decision to leave this year tax forecast unchanged from Budget 2018 in the Stability Programme Update, which was published last month.

By way of contrast, last year at end-quarter one exchequer tax revenues were 2.4 per cent (€282 million) behind profile, while by end-December 2017 overall tax revenues came in slightly ahead of profile by 0.2 per cent or €116 million.

As part of the continuous efforts to improve the Department's tax forecasting performance, last year the ESRI and my Department jointly examined the sensitivity of income tax and USC revenues to changes in income. As a result of this work my Department revised the income tax and USC revenue elasticities used in the forecasting process. These new elasticities were used in the forecasts for Budget 2018. At end-March 2018 overall USC receipts closed the quarter on profile, while the 1.7 per cent (€80 million) shortfall in income tax can be attributed to small under-performances in unearned and self-employed income tax revenues.

### **Corporation Tax Regime**

37. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to establish a minimum effective corporate tax rate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21490/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** On the matter of the effective corporate tax rate paid by corporations in Ireland, there have been seemingly conflicting figures and methodologies used in reference to Ireland. In April 2014, my Department prepared and presented a report for the Finance Committee to explain figures which are quoted and attributed to Ireland on this matter.

This technical paper, available on the Department of Finance's website, provides clarity on the matter and to ensure this piece of work was as objective as possible, my Department commissioned an external and independent academic to co-author the paper. Based on data from

the Central Statistics Office and Revenue, the report highlighted that since 2003 the effective corporate tax rates on Net Operating Surplus and Taxable Income averaged 10.9% and 10.7% respectively.

While these percentages are lower than the 12.5% headline rate, this can be attributed to the availability of the small number of targeted tax measures that are available in Ireland that may lower the effective rate of corporation tax paid in Ireland.

Furthermore, the Comptroller and Auditor General's (C&AG) Report Annual Report for 2016 highlighted that 79 of the top 100 companies paid an effective rate of 10% or more, and almost two-thirds paid in excess of 12%. This supports the previous work carried out by my Department, which demonstrated that the effective rate of corporate tax in Ireland is close to the headline rate of 12.5%.

It is important to note that, of the companies which paid less than an effective rate of 10%, in most of these cases the relevant company was in receipt of foreign dividends for which double tax relief was available for taxes incurred in other jurisdictions in respect of that income. Therefore, when foreign taxes are factored in, the rate of tax was substantially higher.

In a number of cases, the effective corporate tax rate was also impacted by R&D tax credit claims. The R and D tax credit is one of the few reliefs we have which may lower the effective rate of corporate tax paid in Ireland. Some other countries have higher headline rates, supplemented by a high number of tax reliefs, which reduce the overall tax paid. In contrast, Ireland's approach is transparent. We have a competitive headline rate of corporate tax applied to a broad base. Of the small number incentives we have, these are focused on the creation of additional employment and on areas of innovation.

Further work carried out by Revenue, has identified that the effective rate of tax paid by companies in 2015 was provisionally 9.8%, which was a marginal increase on the 2014 rate of 9.7%. The 2012 and 2013 figures are 10.1%. Again, while these percentages are lower than the 12.5% headline rate, this can be attributed to the small number of targeted tax measures available in Ireland.

On the basis of this extensive analysis, I am satisfied that companies in Ireland are paying the appropriate rate of corporate tax on profits generated by those companies in Ireland.

I and my officials recognise the importance of ensuring effective taxation of multinational companies and the need for internationally agreed solutions to counter aggressive tax planning, base erosion and profit shifting. However, we do not believe these issues can be properly addressed by focussing on a minimum effective level of taxation only. A minimum effective tax would be a fundamental change to our system and would be unprecedented in comparison with other jurisdictions.

### **State Aid Investigations**

38. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the progress in respect of funds being lodged in the escrow account in respect of the state aid judgement by the European Commission (details supplied); the funds lodged to date; the likely timetable for the lodgement of additional funds to the account; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21288/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Government does not accept the Commission's analysis in the Apple State aid Decision and has lodged an appeal in the European Courts. However, we have always been clear that we are fully committed to ensuring that

recovery of the alleged Apple State aid takes place and have committed significant resources to ensuring this is achieved. Given the unprecedented scale of the recovery amount, this has been a complex technical and legal process.

As the Deputy may be aware, on 24 April the Escrow Framework Deed which sets out the detailed legal agreement regarding the recovery of the alleged State aid was signed by me on behalf of the Government and also signed by Apple. This is a significant milestone with regard to the commencement of the recovery of the alleged State aid. This followed recent announcements that the Bank of New York Mellon London Branch has been selected as the preferred tenderer for the provision of escrow agency and custodian services to the fund and Amundi, BlackRock Investment Management (UK) Limited and Goldman Sachs Asset Management International have been selected as preferred tenderers for the provision of investment management services.

The signing of the Escrow Framework Deed now allows for the final processes to be completed including the formal appointment of the Escrow Agent/Custodian and the Investment Managers which in turn activates the process for the collection of the alleged State aid.

It is anticipated that the funds will flow into the escrow account in significant tranches during Q2 and Q3 of 2018 and I expect that the full recovery will be effected by the end of Q3 2018.

### **Legislative Programme**

39. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance when the legislation to formally establish the home building finance Ireland scheme will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21456/18]

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

The passage of legislation establishing HBFI is a priority for the Department of Finance. The Government approved the General Scheme of the HBFI Bill on 30 January 2018. Officials in the Department of Finance are actively engaging with the Office of Parliamentary Counsel (OPC) as part of the drafting process. I am informed that the drafting is progressing well and, absent any unforeseen issues, I intend to publish the Bill in the coming weeks.

In parallel to the ongoing work involved in drafting the text of the Bill, officials in my department have been engaging with the European Commission in order to ensure that the establishment and operation of HBFI does not breach EU State aid rules. In order to ensure that HBFI will comply with such rules it is essential that the published Bill provides that HBFI will lend only to commercially viable developments and on market equivalent terms and conditions.

Once published, I am hopeful that the Oireachtas will be in a position to pass the HBFI Bill before the end of the Spring/Summer legislative term, with a view to HBFI commencing operations later in 2018.

*Question No. 40 answered with Question No. 35.*

## Cycle to Work Scheme Expenditure

41. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Finance the amount the cycle to work scheme costs to run; and if he has carried out a cost-benefit analysis of the scheme. [21478/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Deputy will recall that the Cycle To Work scheme came into operation on 1 January 2009. The scheme operates on a self-administration basis, and relief is automatically available provided the employer is satisfied that the conditions of their particular scheme meet the requirements of the legislation. There is no notification procedure for employers involved. This approach was taken with the deliberate intention of keeping the scheme simple and reducing administration on the part of employers.

Accordingly, the Revenue Commissioners do not have statistics on the uptake of the scheme therefore I cannot give the Deputy an annual cost.

It should be noted that the purchase of bicycles and associated safety equipment by employers for employees or directors is subject to the normal Revenue audit procedure with the normal obligations on employers to maintain records (e.g. delivery dockets, invoices, payments details, etc.). The employer is also obliged to keep all salary sacrifice agreements entered into between the employer and employees/directors, together with all signed statements from employees/directors regarding use of the bicycles and safety equipment

It was estimated at the time of the introduction of the scheme that approximately 7,000 employees would avail of it over the first five-year period of its operation, the exemption may apply only once in any five year period in respect of any employee. However anecdotal evidence would suggest that the scheme has been considerably more successful than this and its continuation has been welcomed by the cycle business sector.

While I have not asked my officials to conduct any further specific analysis along the lines set out by the Deputy, I would advise him that all such schemes are reviewed in the context of the annual Budget and Finance Bill process.

## Insurance Costs

42. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Finance the measures that have been taken to meet and engage with insurance companies here regarding excessive premiums being charged to consumers, particularly in counties Cavan and Monaghan. [21169/18]

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

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

Indeed, the problem of rising motor insurance premiums was the main impetus for the establishment of the Cost of Insurance Working Group, which is now chaired by the Minister of State for Financial Services and Insurance, Mr. Michael D'Arcy T.D. Its Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance was published in January 2017. The Report makes 33 recommendations with 71 associated actions to be carried out in agreed timeframes, set out within an Action Plan. The

Working Group continued its work throughout 2017 and subsequently published the Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance in January 2018.

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

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

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

### **Insurance Industry Regulation**

43. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Finance the timeframe to implement the report on the cost of employer and public liability insurance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21387/18]

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

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

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

There is a commitment within the Report that the Working Group will prepare quarterly updates on its progress. Following the four previous such quarterly reports which focused exclusively on the implementation of the Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance, the Fifth Progress Update was published on May 11 and shows that in respect of the eight actions from the Report on Employer and Public Liability Insurance due for completion in Q1 2018, all eight deadlines have been met.

It is appreciated that these eight actions in the main can best be described as stepping stones to the implementation of broader policy initiatives such as, for instance, improving the engagement process between insurers and policyholders with claims submitted against them, and ensuring that enhanced communication between An Garda Síochána and the insurance industry will lead to more effective investigation and prosecution of cases involving insurance fraud. Nevertheless, they are important first steps and I am confident that further significant progress can be made over the coming months.

Accordingly, the Working Group will continue to focus on implementing the recommendations of the Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance, in parallel with implementing those from the 2017 Motor Report. I am hopeful that the cumulative effects of the completion of the two Reports' recommendations will result in increased stability in the pricing of insurance for businesses and improved availability of liability insurance for all types of bodies.

### **Tax Reliefs Availability**

44. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance if he will review corporate tax reliefs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21491/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As the Deputy will be aware, a comprehensive review of the Irish Corporate Tax system, undertaken by Mr Seamus Coffey as an independent expert, was published in 2017.

The terms of reference for the Review of Ireland's Corporation Tax Code included: tax transparency; avoiding preferential treatment; further implementing Ireland's international commitments; delivering tax certainty; maintaining competitiveness; and maintaining the 12.5% corporation tax rate.

The Review was followed by a public consultation on the review's recommendations and on the implementation of the Anti-Tax Avoidance Directive (ATAD). Implementation of the measures agreed at EU level under the ATAD, which include the introduction of Controlled Foreign Corporation rules, anti-hybrid rules, a new interest limitation ratio, the revision of exit tax provisions and review of the general anti-abuse rule, is a very significant undertaking which will substantially transform the corporate tax system over the coming years.

With regards to targeted tax reliefs, the Irish corporation tax regime contains a small number of specifically targeted tax reliefs. The focus of these reliefs is on the creation of additional employment, as is consistent with current government policy, and on innovation, with a view to generating high value-added economic activity in the country. My Department carries out regular reviews of targeted tax reliefs in line with the Department of Finance's Tax Expenditure Guidelines published in 2014. For example in the current year, reviews of the 3 Year Start-Up Relief and the Film Relief are in progress.

### **Tax Code**

45. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the contact he has had with other EU Finance Ministers regarding the proposed EU digital tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21286/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Deputy will be aware that on 21

March the European Commission published two proposed Directives which seek to tax certain digital activities differently within the EU. One, a ‘temporary’ solution for a 3% levy on turnover from certain digital service activities. The second, “comprehensive solution” requires an overhaul of international taxation, establishing the concept of a “digital permanent establishment”, allowing countries taxing rights over the digital business carried out by a company in that country, even where that company has no physical presence there.

Ireland is strongly committed to global tax reform and believes that global solutions are needed to ensure tax is paid by companies where value is created. It is important that we have a system of taxation which is appropriate to meet the challenges and opportunities of a changing world. Therefore I welcomed the opportunity to discuss the proposals with my EU counterparts at the Informal ECOFIN meeting in Sofia on 27-28 April.

There was a healthy debate among my fellow Ministers. While it is clear that there is widespread support for a global solution, Ministers remain divided on the need for independent EU measures, particularly the interim proposal which many Member States see as being flawed. Unanimity is required before any EU tax proposal can be agreed.

I took this opportunity to outline the concerns we have with the proposals. If adopted in their current form, it would result in a significant shift in how corporate tax is paid and may have unanticipated negative consequences for EU MS and companies. Therefore it is important that these proposals are properly considered and analysed.

We need to be careful about introducing novel concepts which could fundamentally alter the model upon which companies are taxed. It is important to be aware of how any unilateral EU measure would be perceived outside of Europe. An EU Digital Services Tax could embolden other jurisdictions to introduce similar measures of their own, jeopardising the likelihood of achieving a global solution.

Ireland will continue to actively engage on these matters with our fellow Member States and at OECD level so that we have a system of international taxation which is appropriate to meet the challenges and opportunities that arise from the digitisation of the economy.

### **Insurance Compensation Fund**

46. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance when claimants in relation to a company (details supplied) will receive compensation; the reason there are ongoing delays; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21435/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Setanta Insurance was placed into liquidation by the Malta Financial Services Authority on 30 April 2014. As it was a Maltese incorporated company, the liquidation is being carried out under Maltese law.

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

The Deputy will also be aware of my decision in principle that the State will ensure that Setanta third party claimants are compensated in full, which was announced on 30 January. The Department of Finance has received confirmation from the Office of the Attorney General that there are no state-aid or other legal issues with this decision, and has therefore proceeded with the detailed arrangements to implement it. An additional provision to give effect to this deci-

sion is being included in the Insurance (Amendment) Bill, which is currently being finalised by my officials in liaison with the Office of Parliamentary Counsel and is expected to be published shortly. Once this is done the likely timeline for payment will become clearer, including the payment of the additional 35% to those who have settled their claims and have already received compensation of 65% of their claim subject to the limit outlined above.

I have also been informed by the Accountant of the Courts of Justice, that the High Court approved his application for payment out of the ICF on the 11 May 2018 in relation to some 403 claims to the value of c €7.6m. These payments will be paid within 15 working days from the date of the order and will be subject to the 65%/€825,000 limit.

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

### **Legislative Programme**

47. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance his plans with regard to the creation of a rainy day fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21437/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am pleased to say that the General Scheme of a Rainy Day Bill has been prepared. I have circulated my proposals with a view to bringing them to Government in the coming weeks for a decision on drafting, in parallel with pre-legislative scrutiny.

The Bill will provide the necessary legislative underpinning for the Fund. My intention remains to transfer €1.5 billion from the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund, and to make annual transfers of €500 million per year in each year from 2019 to 2021, as was published last month in the Stability Programme Update.

My discussions with the Budgetary Oversight Committee in January this year have been constructive in formulating the detailed proposals, and I look forward to further positive engagement through the legislative process.

### **Local Authority Housing Provision**

48. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the steps he will take to alleviate the serious housing shortage at local authority direct build level; his views on whether in view of market trends that unless the housing crisis is resolved by way of urgent capital intervention and the likelihood is increased, demands for higher wages which in turn will lead to further crises in the future; if an emergency housing programme for local authorities will be approved; his views on the economic benefit of alleviating the pressure which forces persons on lower incomes into rent situations that they cannot afford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21451/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Housing policy is a matter for the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government.

The Government's primary response to the current issues in the housing market is contained in 'Rebuilding Ireland: An Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness'. Under Rebuilding

Ireland, a total of 33,437 social homes will be built out to 2021. A further 16,566 will be leased or acquired. Increasing supply is key to addressing the current difficulties in the housing market, and the direct construction of homes by Local Authorities is a key component of this. This action is possible due to the provision of significant capital funding. €1.14 billion of capital expenditure will be spent in 2018 and a total of €6 billion will be invested out to 2021. In total, there has been a 145% increase in Exchequer capital funding for new builds and acquisitions since 2016.

In addition to the funding provided to directly build more social homes, Budget 2018 contained a number of initiatives aimed at increasing the overall supply of new homes. An extra €75 million is being provided under the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF), bringing total LIHAF funding to €275 million. When combined with the Local Authority matching contributions, this fund has the potential to provide approximately 5,000 homes by 2021. At Budget 2018, I also introduced measures that will increase the supply of private housing. Home Building Finance Ireland (HBFi) will boost the supply of debt funding to residential development. Utilising up to €750 million from the Irish Strategic Investment Fund, HBFi will fund new housing construction across all regions in the country.

In addition to the initiatives outlined above, the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government will shortly bring forward proposals in relation to increasing the supply of affordable homes. My Department will be engaging fully with the Department of Housing on these measures. The availability of suitable housing is a crucial component in our ability to attract investment. I will continue to work with all stakeholders across Government and the construction industry to increase the supply of such homes and maintain our international competitiveness.

### **Property Tax Review**

49. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance if a review of the local property tax and its impact on increasing wealth inequality here will be produced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21488/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** At the outset, I wish to outline Ireland's position regarding the distribution of wealth. In 2013, the Central Statistics Office conducted the Household Finance and Consumption Survey (HFCS), which provided the first comprehensive data on Irish household wealth.

The net wealth Gini coefficient is a commonly used measure of inequality, where a figure of 100 indicates that one household holds all the wealth and 0 indicates that wealth is evenly divided among all households. This measure, based on the HFCS data, indicates that wealth inequality in Ireland (64) for 2013 is lower than the euro area average (69). In addition, the HFCS results also show that wealth in Ireland is less concentrated at the top of the distribution (i.e. the top 1% of the population) than the euro area average.

The Irish Government is committed to various targets, policies and initiatives to further reduce inequality in Ireland. Firstly, we are committed to further implementation and progress towards our inequality reduction goals within the Programme for Partnership Government, particularly in the context of the budgetary process. Our highly progressive income tax and well targeted welfare systems are notably successful at reducing income inequality. In fact, the most up-to-date OECD data available show that Ireland's tax and welfare system creates the largest improvement in the equality of income distribution of all OECD countries for which data are available. We are also dedicated to further advancements in the area of limiting tax avoidance, which is evident, for example, through our involvement in the OECD BEPS initiative. Fur-

thermore, additional policy measures such as regular reviews and/or increases of the national minimum wage also support the goal of a more equal income distribution.

The charging structure for the LPT is progressive. The basic rate of 0.18 percent applies up to property values of €1 m with a higher rate of 0.25 percent applying on the portion of value above the €1 m threshold. In addition to the progressive rate structure, and to the extent that better off people tend to own more valuable properties, the LPT is a progressive tax particularly over the life cycles of tax payers.

In January I announced a review of the Local Property Tax (LPT) which is looking in particular at the impact on LPT liabilities of property price developments. The review includes an examination of the outstanding recommendations of the 2015 Thornhill review of the Local Property Tax. A number of these recommendations call for the existing LPT deferral provisions should be continued and be reviewed and revised at frequent intervals in line with movements in the CPI so as to maintain their real value and that the period of relief for income-stressed owner-occupiers who have outstanding mortgages should be extended beyond the end of 2017. In addition there is a recommendation that for owner-occupiers over 80 years of age or those with stated certified long term illnesses and disabilities who are also living alone that consideration be given to raising the eligible income limit for deferrals to €20,000.

It is expected that the review will be completed at the end of August and that the review report will provide a number of policy choices for consideration. The review will be informed by the desirability of achieving relative stability, both over the short and longer terms, in LPT payments of liable persons.

### **Legislative Programme**

50. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance when legislation on the rainy day fund will be published; if his Department has completed its examination on the main functions of the proposed €500 million fund; the cases in which this includes a cost-benefit analysis in relation to the deferred public expenditure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21625/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I expect to bring my proposals for the general scheme of a Rainy Day Fund Bill to Government for decision in the coming weeks. Following the consideration of Government, I would expect to forward the general scheme of the Bill to the Oireachtas for its consideration.

I would hope to progress the Bill quickly, but I am not yet in a position to give a detailed timeline. The principal purpose of the Fund is to mitigate future external economic shocks by setting aside a reserve which can be drawn on in the event of such a shock. It is a prudent measure being taken at a time when our public finances are relatively strong, intended to increase our economic resilience.

Given the unpredictability of economic shocks and the consequential uncertainty as to how the Fund will ultimately be disbursed, it is not possible to prepare a meaningful cost benefit analysis on its ultimate expenditure. However, I would expect the funds to be used as part of voted expenditure. My officials are preparing a regulatory impact analysis which will be published together with the Bill.

### **Defence Forces Strength**

51. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the strength of the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service, excluding all recruits, apprentices and cadets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21521/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** As of 31 March 2018 (the latest date for which figures are available), the whole time equivalent strength of the Permanent Defence Force was 8,993 comprised of:

- Army 7,229 personnel
- Air Corps 717 personnel
- Naval Service 1,047 personnel

The following table, provided by the military authorities, details the number of Cadets, General Service Recruits and Apprentices that are included in the above strength figures:

Rank	ARMY	AIR CORPS	NAVAL SERVICE	TOTAL
Cadets	78	30	29	137
General Service Recruits	97	11	0	108
Apprentices	0	42	0	42

The primary focus of the Defence Forces, when not engaged in operations, is training and preparation to ensure the capabilities required to fulfil its roles are developed and maintained.

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

### Overseas Missions Data

52. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of Irish soldiers that served in Chad between 2008 and 2010; and the number of soldiers that had to be repatriated ahead of schedule or ahead of the end of their deployment on health or other grounds. [21534/18]

53. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the cost of repatriating soldiers ahead of schedule; and if such journeys were reimbursed by the UN. [21535/18]

54. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the cost of Ireland's participation in the UN mission in Chad in 2008 to 2010; and the amount that was reimbursed by the UN. [21536/18]

55. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if military or other equipment related to Ireland's mission in Chad was left behind as being too expensive or not cost effective to return here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21537/18]

59. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if Irish soldiers that served in Chad on UN duties in each of the years 2008 to 2010, that were repatriated on medical grounds were deemed less than critical. [21721/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 52 to 55, inclusive, and 59 together.

The Defence Forces troop contribution to the United Nations mandated, European Union led peacekeeping mission to Chad and the Central African Republic commenced on 21 February 2008. Initially the force was known as EUFOR TCHAD/RCA. The aim of the mission was to protect civilians in danger, particularly refugees and internally displaced persons, facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid and protect UN personnel. It helped to create a safe and secure environment where humanitarian aid could be delivered safely and the local civilian population could go about their lives in safety. EUFOR TCHAD/RCA was mandated under a UN Security Council Resolution.

On 20 November, 2007, Government approved the despatch of a contingent of Permanent Defence Force personnel to the EUFOR TCHAD/RCA mission. A resolution was also passed in Dáil Éireann on 28 November, 2007, approving participation in the mission.

The force changed over to UN command on 15 March 2009 and became known as United Nations Mission in Chad and the Central African Republic (MINURCAT). On 28 October, 2008, Government approved the continued participation of the Defence Forces in this follow-on mission.

On 30 March, 2010, in the face of significant uncertainty regarding renewal of the mission mandate, the Government decided to withdraw the Irish contingent from MINURCAT for logistical reasons ahead of the onset of the rainy season. In May 2010, the United Nations Security Council decided to terminate the MINURCAT mission at the end of 2010.

In the case of EU led missions, costs are borne by the participating States on the basis of “costs lie where they fall”. As such, the costs of participation in EUFOR TCHAD/RCA mission was met by each of the relevant troop contributing countries including Ireland. Ireland also contributed to the common costs of the operation under the Athena Mechanism. These costs are allocated across the EU member States (except for Denmark which has an opt-out) on the basis of a GNI key. As MINURCAT was a UN led operation the UN reimbursed certain troop and equipment costs mainly in the form of Appropriations-in-Aid to the Exchequer.

As published in the Departments Appropriation Accounts, the cost of participation in the EUFOR Chad mission in 2008 was €39.1m, the cost of participation in EUFOR Chad and MINURCAT in 2009 was €42.3m and the cost of participation in MINURCAT in 2010 was €21.2m. Total receipts from the UN in respect of the MINURCAT mission amounted to €19.5m. Ireland's contribution of personnel to these missions was in the region of 420 personnel per month.

Certain equipment and assets were not brought back to Ireland following completion of our deployment in Chad as it was deemed economically unviable to do so. This equipment was handed over to the UN for disposal and included gymnasium equipment, kitchen equipment, trailers, multi-cabins, waste tyres and oil, timber decking and plastic matting.

There are currently 637 members of the Defence Forces serving in missions overseas. Individual Permanent Defence Force personnel are repatriated ahead of the scheduled rotation date from time-to time at Ireland's expense for a variety of reasons, including health grounds, family bereavement and disciplinary issues. Records of overall numbers and costs of repatriation are not held in a readily accessible format.

## **Defence Forces Data**

56. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of psychiatrists employed by the Defence Forces in whole-time equivalent terms. [21539/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** Psychiatric services for the Defence Forces are currently provided on a contract for services basis. The contracted individual attends two days per week and has advised that he will cease to attend with effect from 31 May 2018. The Defence Forces are identifying alternative options for the provision of psychiatric services.

### **Commemorative Medals**

57. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to award the commemorative 2016 Centenary Medal to members of an association (details supplied) that participated in 2016 centenary ceremonies. [21652/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** As the Deputy will be aware, the Programme for Government provided for the award of a commemorative medal to all Defence Forces personnel, Permanent and Reserve, who were recorded as being in service in the course of 2016. This was a special acknowledgement from the Government to the members of Óglaigh na hÉireann who served during the centenary year of 2016. The 1916 Centenary Commemorative Medal was awarded as a commemorative medal, personal to an individual's service in the Defence Forces in the course of 2016.

There are no plans to award the 1916 Centenary Commemorative Medal to former members of the Defence Forces. Since the foundation of the State many thousands of personnel have served in the Defence Forces. It would not be administratively possible within the resources of the Department to identify and contact all of these persons, decide on eligibility and, in the case of infirm or deceased former members, resolve who should get the medal on their behalf.

At my request, however, discussions took place between the Department and the Veterans' Associations; the Irish United Nations Veterans Association (IUNVA), the Organisation of National Ex-Service Personnel (ONE), and the Association of Retired Commissioned Officers (ARCO), to explore alternative means of recognition of the contribution of veterans to the centenary commemorative events in 2016.

Following these discussions, it was agreed that a single presentation would be made to each of the Veterans Associations of a framed medal with an accompanying citation in recognition of the significant contribution of members of the three organisations to the 1916 centenary commemorative events and their service to the State. The medal has a bar with the term Veteran inscribed on it. I agreed that a plaque would be given to each of IUNVA's 21 Posts and to each of O.N.E.'s 41 Branches. I presented one plaque to each of the three Veterans' Associations at last year's Defence Forces' Veterans' Day which took place in the Defence Forces Training Centre, the Curragh, on Sunday 8 October 2017. The other plaques were presented separately.

### **Middle East Issues**

58. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he has held a meeting with the Minister of State with special responsibility for Defence regarding the development in the Golan Heights in which Irish soldiers are assisting. [21485/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** In my capacity

as Minister with Responsibility for Defence, I regularly update the Taoiseach on a range of Defence related issues.

The Taoiseach was kept fully informed on developments on the Golan Heights last week, where shelling and rocket attacks were reported. All Irish Defence Forces personnel were reported safe and accounted for in their deployment with UNDOF following the incident. The situation in the Golan Heights is being closely monitored and the Taoiseach will continue to be kept fully updated on any developments in the area.

*Question No. 59 answered with Question No. 52.*

### Consular Services Data

60. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of staff at each Irish Embassy and Consular General office as of 4 May 2018, by grade; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21496/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Ireland’s diplomatic network is critical to the achievement of our foreign policy and trade goals. Information on Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade staff in missions abroad is set out by grade in the following table:

Mission	Staff numbers as at 04 May 2018
Abu Dhabi	1 Assistant Secretary 1 Third Secretary 6 locally recruited staff
Abuja	1 Counsellor 1 Third Secretary 5 locally recruited staff
Addis Ababa	1 Assistant Secretary 1 Senior Development Specialist 2 Development Specialists 1 Third Secretary 5 locally recruited staff
Ankara	1 Counsellor 1 Development Specialist 1 Assistant Principal Officer 1 Third Secretary 4 locally recruited staff
Athens	1 Assistant Secretary 1 First Secretary 1 Third Secretary 5 locally recruited staff
Atlanta CG	1 First Secretary 2 locally recruited staff
Austin CG	1 First Secretary 3 locally recruited staff
Bangkok	1 Deputy Secretary General 1 Third Secretary 7 locally recruited staff

Questions - Written Answers

Mission	Staff numbers as at 04 May 2018
Beijing	1 Assistant Secretary 1 Counsellor 2 First Secretaries 2 Third Secretaries 1 Executive Officer 1 Clerical Officer 12 locally recruited staff
Berlin	1 Second Secretary General 1 Counsellor 1 Assistant Legal Adviser 3 First Secretaries 1 Third Secretary 12 locally recruited staff
Berne	1 Counsellor 1 Third Secretary 3 locally recruited staff
Boston CG	1 Assistant Principal Officer 1 Third Secretary 4 locally recruited staff
Brasilia	1 Principal Officer 1 Third Secretary 4 locally recruited staff
Bratislava	1 First Secretary 2 locally recruited staff
Brussels Embassy (incl PFP)	1 Counsellor 1 First Secretary 1 Third Secretary 1 Clerical Officer 4 locally recruited staff
Brussels (Perma- nent Representa- tion of Ireland to the EU) – includes staff on second- ment from other Government De- partments	2 Assistant Secretaries 3 Counsellors 6 Principal Officers 9 First Secretaries 22 Assistant Principal Officers 6 Third Secretaries 1 Administrative Officer 1 Higher Executive Officer 3 Executive Officers 16 Clerical Officers 7 locally recruited staff
Bucharest	1 Principal Officer 1 Higher Executive Officer 5 locally recruited staff
Budapest	1 Counsellor 1 Third Secretary 4 locally recruited staff

Mission	Staff numbers as at 04 May 2018
Buenos Aires	(Vacancy – Head of Mission) 1 Third Secretary 4 locally recruited staff
Cairo	1 Counsellor 1 First Secretary 1 Higher Executive Officer 6 locally recruited staff
Canberra	1 Counsellor 1 First Secretary 1 Higher Executive Officer 9 locally recruited staff
Chicago CG	1 First Secretary 1 Third Secretary 5 locally recruited staff
Copenhagen	1 Counsellor 1 Third Secretary 5 locally recruited staff
Dar-es-Salaam	1 Counsellor 1 Senior Development Specialist 2 Development Specialists 1 Third Secretary 4 locally recruited staff
Edinburgh CG	1 First Secretary 1 Third Secretary 1 Clerical Officer 1 locally recruited staff
Edinburgh BIC	1 First Secretary
Freetown	1 First Secretary 1 Development Specialist 1 Third Secretary 4 locally recruited staff
Geneva PMUN	1 Assistant Secretary 2 First Secretaries 1 Third Secretary 1 Executive Officer 1 Clerical Officer 6 locally recruited staff
Hanoi	1 Counsellor 1 Senior Development Specialist 1 Development Specialist 1 Third Secretary 1 Clerical Officer 6 locally recruited staff
Helsinki	1 Assistant Secretary 1 Third Secretary 3 locally recruited staff
Holy See	1 First Secretary 3 locally recruited staff

Questions - Written Answers

Mission	Staff numbers as at 04 May 2018
Hong Kong CG	1 First Secretary 1 Third Secretary 1 Clerical Officer 2 locally recruited staff
Jakarta	1 Counsellor 1 Third Secretary 5 locally recruited staff
Kampala	1 Principal Development Specialist 2 Development Specialists 1 Third Secretary 5 locally recruited staff
Kuala Lumpur	1 Counsellor 1 Higher Executive Officer 4 locally recruited staff
Lilongwe	1 Counsellor 2 Development Specialists 1 Third Secretary 5 locally recruited staff
Lisbon	1 Counsellor 1 Higher Executive Officer 4 locally recruited staff
Ljubljana	1 First Secretary 1 Higher Executive Officer 3 locally recruited staff
London - includes staff on secondment from other Government Departments	1 Second Secretary General 2 Counsellors 2 Principal Officers 2 First Secretaries 2 Assistant Principal Officers 4 Third Secretaries 4 Higher Executive Officers 7 Executive Officers 10 Clerical Officers 23 locally recruited staff
Lusaka	1 Senior Development Specialist 1 Development Specialist 1 Third Secretary 4 locally recruited staff
Luxembourg	1 Assistant Principal Officer 3 locally recruited staff
Madrid	1 Counsellor 1 First Secretary 1 Third Secretary 10 locally recruited staff

Mission	Staff numbers as at 04 May 2018
Maputo	1 Principal Development Specialist 1 Senior Development Specialist 2 Development Specialists 1 Third Secretary 8 locally recruited staff
Mexico	1 Assistant Secretary 1 First Secretary 1 Third Secretary 5 locally recruited staff
Monrovia	1 Development Specialist
Moscow	1 Counsellor (Vacancy – First Secretary) 1 Higher Executive Officer 2 Clerical Officers 9 locally recruited staff
Nairobi	1 Principal Development Specialist 1 Development Specialist 1 Higher Executive Officer 5 locally recruited staff
New Delhi	1 Counsellor 1 First Secretary 1 Third Secretary 7 locally recruited staff
New York CG	1 Counsellor 1 First Secretary 1 Third Secretary 2 Executive Officers 12 locally recruited staff
New York PMUN	1 Second Secretary General 2 Counsellors 5 First Secretaries 2 Third Secretaries 1 Executive Officer 8 locally recruited staff
Nicosia	1 First Secretary 3 locally recruited staff
Oslo	1 Counsellor 1 Third Secretary 3 locally recruited staff
Ottawa	1 Counsellor 1 First Secretary 1 Third Secretary 7 locally recruited staff

*Questions - Written Answers*

Mission	Staff numbers as at 04 May 2018
Paris - includes staff on secondment from other Government Departments	1 Assistant Secretary 1 Counsellor 2 First Secretaries 1 Assistant Principal Officer 2 Third Secretaries 14 locally recruited staff
Paris OECD	1 Principal Officer (Vacancy – First Secretary) 4 locally recruited staff
Prague	1 Counsellor 1 Higher Executive Officer 6 locally recruited staff
Pretoria	1 Counsellor 1 First Secretary 1 Development Specialist 1 Third Secretary 1 Higher Executive Officer 8 locally recruited staff
Ramallah	1 Counsellor 1 Third Secretary 4 locally recruited staff
Riga	1 First Secretary 2 locally recruited staff
Riyadh	1 Principal Officer (Vacancy – Third Secretary) 8 locally recruited staff
Rome	1 Assistant Secretary 1 Assistant Principal Officer 1 Third Secretary 13 locally recruited staff
San Francisco CG	1 First Secretary 1 Third Secretary 4 locally recruited staff
Sao Paulo CG	1 First Secretary 1 Third Secretary 2 locally recruited staff
Seoul	1 Counsellor 1 First Secretary 4 locally recruited staff
Shanghai CG	1 First Secretary 1 Third Secretary 1 Clerical Officer 5 locally recruited staff
Singapore	1 Counsellor 1 Third Secretary 5 locally recruited staff

Mission	Staff numbers as at 04 May 2018
Sofia	1 Counsellor 1 Third Secretary 4 locally recruited staff
Stockholm	1 Counsellor 1 Third Secretary 4 locally recruited staff
Strasbourg Council of Europe	1 Counsellor 1 Third Secretary 5 locally recruited staff
Sydney CG	1 First Secretary 1 Third Secretary 4 locally recruited staff
Tallinn	1 Assistant Principal Officer 3 locally recruited staff
Tel Aviv	1 Counsellor 1 First Secretary 3 locally recruited staff
The Hague	1 Counsellor 1 First Secretary 1 Third Secretary 6 locally recruited staff
Tokyo	(Vacancy – Head of Mission) 1 First Secretary 1 Third Secretary 7 locally recruited staff
Valletta	1 First Secretary 3 locally recruited staff
Vienna Embassy	1 Assistant Secretary 1 First Secretary 1 Third Secretary 5 locally recruited staff
Vienna OSCE	1 Counsellor 1 First Secretary 2 locally recruited staff
Vilnius	1 First Secretary 3 locally recruited staff
Warsaw	1 Counsellor 1 First Secretary 1 Third Secretary 5 locally recruited staff
Washington	1 Assistant Secretary 1 Counsellor 4 First Secretaries 1 Third Secretary 1 Higher Executive Officer 1 Clerical Officer 7 locally recruited staff

Mission	Staff numbers as at 04 May 2018
Zagreb	1 First Secretary 2 locally recruited staff

### Commencement of Legislation

61. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade when sections 14(8) and 14(9) of the Passport Act 2008 will come into effect; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21497/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Sections 14(8) and 14(9) of the Passports Act 2008 have not yet been commenced.

These Sections of the Passports Act, if commenced, would provide that guardians’ consent to the issuing of a passport would be considered to be enduring for the child up to the age of 18. The commencement of these provisions, including required technology updates, are under active consideration as part of the passport reform programme which will run until the end of 2018.

### Ministerial Meetings

62. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has had discussions with the Chinese ambassador to Ireland; if so, the nature of the meeting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21696/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** As Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, I maintain contact with China’s Ambassador to Ireland as I do with all the Ambassadors of foreign states.

The Government is strongly committed to further deepening links between Ireland and China at all levels and the Chinese embassy in Dublin plays an important and constructive role in that regard.

I meet the Ambassador regularly at professional engagements as part of the normal course of business of my Department. For example, on 9 May the Ambassador participated in bilateral discussions which I held with Beijing Party Secretary Cai Qi and a number of his colleagues during the Party Secretary’s recent visit to Ireland.

In February 2018, I met by appointment with the Ambassador, primarily to discuss plans for my upcoming visit to China for St Patrick’s Day the following month. A range of other issues were also discussed including the launch of direct flights between Dublin and Beijing, access for Irish beef to the Chinese market and China’s Belt and Road initiative.

### Tax Reliefs Availability

63. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Finance the tax reliefs or incentives available for persons that decide to leave full-time employment to pursue setting up their own business (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21542/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Start-Up Relief for Entrepreneurs (SURE) is a tax relief for individuals who leave full-time employment and start up their own

business. In general terms, relief under SURE is available for an individual who:

- Gives up full-time employment elsewhere to take up full-time employment with the new company.

- Sets up a new company to carry out a new trade. Therefore, companies that carry on a trade previously carried out by another person do not qualify. Nor do many consulting companies, which carry out a profession rather than a trade, qualify.

- Invests in ordinary share capital of the new company.

The relief available is based on the amount invested and the amount of tax paid, through the PAYE system, for the previous 6 years.

The Deputy may wish to be aware that the relief is currently being reviewed along with the Employment and Investment Incentive. The review is being carried out by Indecon Economic Consultants. A public consultation process is also being carried out as part of the review.

### **Insurance Costs**

64. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Finance if an unsustainable situation facing an organisation (details supplied) in County Donegal and nationally which is facing a large increase in insurance costs with members unable to pay their renewals will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21645/18]

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

However, what was recognised with the establishment of the Cost of Insurance Working Group was that the environment within which insurers conduct their business can be better shaped, in order to make the Irish insurance market a more competitive one and also make it more attractive for new entrants. In this regard, the initial focus of the Working Group was the issue of rising motor insurance premiums and the Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance was published in January 2017. The second phase of the Cost of Insurance Working Group under the Chairmanship of the Minister of State for Financial Services and Insurance, Michael D'Arcy TD, published its report in relation to employer liability and public liability insurance in January 2018. This Report acknowledges that many of the difficulties being faced by business are also impacting community groups, including men's sheds.

The Working Group's second Report makes 15 recommendations with 29 associated actions to be carried out. The recommendations and actions are detailed in an action plan contained in the report with agreed timelines for implementation. All 29 actions are scheduled to be implemented before the end of 2019, with 26 due for completion this year. The recommendations,

covering three main themes, include actions to:

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

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

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

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

b. tackling fraudulent or exaggerated claims; and

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

The fifth Quarterly Progress Update on implementation was published on 11 May and is available on the website of the Department of Finance. In respect of the actions from the Report due for completion in Q1 2018, all eight deadlines have been met.

While the focus of the Reports was to examine the cost of insurance for motorists and for businesses in particular, it is envisaged that the cumulative effect of the implementation of the recommendations, with the appropriate levels of commitment and cooperation from all relevant stakeholders, will achieve the objective of delivering fairer premiums for consumers and businesses, and also beneficially impact community, voluntary and charitable organisations in Donegal and across the country.

### **Commencement of Legislation**

65. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Finance when section 76 of the Finance Act 2015 will come into effect; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21506/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Sections 888 and 894 of the Taxes Consolidation Act (TCA) 1997 impose an obligation on lessors, lessees and agents in relation to rental property to return certain information in relation to rental income to Revenue. The persons obliged to return this information to Revenue include any Minister of the Government, the Health Service Executive, or any Local Authority or similar body which pays rent or rent subsidies.

A relevant person is required to file a return of third party information in respect of lettings operated by them. This return must be filed by 31 October in the year following the year of assessment.

Section 76 of the Finance Act 2015 amends section 888 TCA 1997, to require letting agents to include both the tax reference number of each property owner and the Local Property Tax (LPT) number of each residential property. This amendment is to come into effect by way of Ministerial Order.

I have been advised by Revenue that concerns were raised by some of the Government bod-

ies impacted that they may not be in a position to fully satisfy the additional reporting requirements as the appropriate infrastructure to facilitate the recording and reporting of this additional information is not yet in place. Revenue is liaising with the Government bodies impacted in order to agree an implementation timeframe and following that process will advise on an appropriate time for commencement of this provision.

### **Tax Yield**

66. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated revenue that could be raised if the sugar sweetened drinks tax was extended to include mineral waters and aerated waters that contain added sugar; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21523/18]

67. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated revenue that could be raised if the sugar sweetened drinks tax was extended to include non-alcoholic beer and alcohol free wine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21524/18]

68. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated revenue that could be raised if the sugar sweetened drinks tax was extended to include soya based beverages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21525/18]

69. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated revenue that could be raised if the sugar sweetened drinks tax was extended to include beverages based on nuts, cereals or seeds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21526/18]

70. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated revenue that could be raised if the sugar sweetened drinks tax was extended to include milk based products; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21527/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 66 to 70, inclusive, together.

The sugar-sweetened drinks tax applies to products if they satisfy three criteria.

The first of which is the Customs Combined Nomenclature Code - the tax applies to fruit juices (CN Code 2009) and waters, including mineral and waters and aerated water (CN Code 2202). The second of which is if they contain added sugar, and the third criteria is if they contain 5 grams of sugar or more per 100 millilitres.

The rationale behind the tax is to help tackle the overweight and obesity problem in Ireland. A small number of exemptions exist for drinks within the CN 2202 category on the basis of the policy rationale for the introduction of the tax. These include, non-alcoholic products as they offer an alternative to alcohol products. Soya, cereal, nut, and seed based drinks offer an alternative to dairy for persons with dietary requirements such as lactose intolerance. Further to this, products with milk fats are exempted as they are comparable to dairy products such as milk. Milk is outside of the tax on the basis of the health benefits it offers such as calcium and protein. For reasons of clarity an amendment to the legislation will be brought forward in this years Finance Bill to impose a calcium threshold on products within these exempt categories.

In order to ensure that the tax is free from State aid a formal notification of Ireland's intention to introduce the tax was submitted to the European Commission earlier this year. The Commission found that the tax, as designed, did not constitute aid.

It is estimated that the yield from the sugar sweetened drinks tax will be of the order of €40m

in a full year. The additional tax yield from extending the scope of the tax to the aforementioned products is likely to be very low. In any event, as the design and scope of the tax have been approved by the European Commission it is not possible to alter these without opening up the potential for litigation and consequently the potential to jeopardise the existence of the tax.

### Bank Charges

71. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the reason a bank (details supplied) is charging customers a break fee significantly higher than other banks if they decide to move from a fixed rate apparently in contravention of the Mortgage Credit Directive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21577/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I have received the following response from AIB:

“ AIB adheres fully to the Mortgage Credit Regulation (MCR) and explicitly in relation to section 26 – Early Repayment. The bank is satisfied any breakage costs charged do not exceed the financial loss incurred. There are a variety of different methodologies being applied within the market to calculate breakage fees, and it is important to state, no standard methodology was prescribed by MCR. AIB Bank breakage costs are calculated as per the below worked example:

*(A) the amount of the prepayment or early repayment = € 100,000*

*(U) is the unexpired term of the fixed interest rate period (in months = 2 years (24 months) on basis a customer fixed for 5 years (60 months) and are now breaking out of fixed rate after 3 years (36 months)*

*(D%) is the difference between the fixed interest rate applying to the facility and the fixed interest rate which would then apply to the facility for the amount of “A” for the term of “U” = 1% on the basis a Customer fixed at a 5 year rate of 4.25% and the fixed rate for the unexpired period (i.e. 24 months) is 3.25%*

*So, applying the formula  $A \times U \times D$ : € 100,000 x 24/12 x 1% = € 2,000*

*Important: where the remaining term of the fixed rate is between fixed rate terms e.g. 18 months, the breakage cost calculates at the current 2 year fixed and at the current 1 year Fixed and quotes the customer whichever is the lowest breakage fee amount.*

*Details of rates used by AIB to calculate breakages are detailed here: <https://aib.ie/our-products/mortgages/mortgage-interest-rates>.*

AIB does not impose any penalties or other administration fees for operational costs incurred in breaking of a fixed rate mortgage contract over and above the break funding formula and does not make any profit or gain from the application of breakage costs to customers.”

### Stamp Duty

72. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Finance if approval from the European Commission to levy a lower rate of stamp duty has been obtained (details supplied); the way in which farmers that have recently purchased lands for the purposes of the consolidation will be treated in terms of paying the lower rate of stamp duty; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21646/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As I have outlined in a number of PQ replies recently, the measure legislated for in section 68 of Finance Act 2017 (which was not a Budget measure) will allow a farmer to claim relief from stamp duty where he or she sells and purchases land for the purposes of consolidating an existing farm holding has been introduced, 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 only be paid 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. 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: ([www.agriculture.gov.ie/media/migration/formsdownloads/V12CGTGuidelinesfinal060315.pdf](http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/media/migration/formsdownloads/V12CGTGuidelinesfinal060315.pdf)).

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 01 January 2018, so farmers who consolidate their holdings prior to the commencement of the relief will still be eligible.

I understand that the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine has recently made an application to the European Commission for State Aid approval of the measure and that a response is awaited.

It follows that, at this point, no definitive date for the commencement of the relief can be provided. I would however wish to emphasise that, subject to state aid approval and commencement, any eligible consolidation that takes place on or after 1 January 2018 and on or before 31 December 2020 will benefit from the consolidation measure introduced in section 68 of Finance Act 2017 (No 41 of 2017).

### **Credit Availability**

73. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Finance if he is satisfied with the level of lending to small and medium enterprises by each of the banks; if his attention has been drawn to the widespread concerns in relation to the difficulties encountered by such enterprises in securing finance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21660/18]

74. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Finance if he is satisfied with the level of lending by each of the banks to the farming sector; if his attention has been drawn to widespread concerns of many farmers in securing funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21661/18]

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

Supporting the availability of finance for SMEs is a cornerstone element of Government policy in our efforts to strengthen the economy and create jobs.

My Department commissions biannual surveys to ascertain the demand for credit by SMEs. This survey series, most recently conducted by Fitzpatrick Consultants and Behaviour and Attitudes on behalf of my Department, is the most comprehensive survey of SME credit demand in Ireland, covering 1,500 respondents and involving over 6,000 direct telephone calls to SMEs. SMEs of all sizes, trading in all sectors, excluding property development and speculative activities, are included. The survey covers demand for credit from both bank and non-bank sources.

I would draw the Deputy's attention to the most recently published Department of Finance SME Credit Demand Survey, covering the period April to September 2017, which can be found at [www.finance.gov.ie](http://www.finance.gov.ie). The results of this survey shows that, when pending applications are excluded, 84% of credit applications to banks were approved or partially approved. Purchases, replacement or lease of new vehicle/equipment is now provided as the main reason for applying for bank finance with 29% stating this is why they requested bank finance. The survey also showed continued positive trends in terms of trading performance, profitability and employment.

Government is focused on ensuring that all viable SMEs have access to an appropriate supply of credit from a diverse range of bank and non-bank sources. In this regard the Government has developed a number of initiatives to ensure that the supply of credit in the market is sufficient to meet the existing and future funding needs of SMEs. It should also be noted that the SBCI have reported that, as of year-end 2017, 24% of their loans (by value) were to SMEs operating in the agriculture sector.

In addition, to address the challenges posed to SMEs by Brexit, last year the Government announced a Brexit Loan Scheme. This provides affordable working capital financing to SMEs and small mid-caps that can demonstrate that they are either currently impacted by Brexit or will be in the future. The Scheme is operating from March 2018 to March 2020 and is delivered by the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland through commercial lenders and will serve to get much needed working capital into Irish businesses. The Scheme has made €300 million available to businesses of up to 499 employees, and will be open to both clients of State Agencies and businesses with no relationship with State Agencies.

All viable SMEs operating in Ireland should have the opportunity to access sufficient finance to meet their enterprise needs in a manner that supports growth and employment in the economy and the Government remains committed to the SME sector, as reflected in the Programme for a Partnership Government. Consequently, my Department and the Credit Review Office, working with the other relevant Departments and Agencies, will continue to monitor the availability of both bank and non-bank credit to viable SMEs including those in the farming community.

### **Economic Competitiveness**

75. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the degree to which Ireland's economic situation continues to compete effectively with all others in the EU having particular regard to the situation in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21676/18]

78. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which he remains satisfied that Ireland remains a competitive economy and attractive to indigenous investors and foreign direct investors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21679/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 75 and 78 together.

The recovery in the Irish economy over the last number of years, in part, reflects the improvements in Ireland's competitiveness. As of February 2018, Ireland's competitiveness, as measured by the Central Bank's Harmonised Competitiveness Index, has improved by approximately 19 per cent since 2008. The improvement in Ireland's competitiveness has also been reflected in our international competitiveness rankings. For example since 2011 Ireland has risen from 24th to 6th on the IMD World Competitiveness Rankings.

The improvement in Ireland's competitiveness reflects a moderation in both wages and prices, along with substantial productivity gains in our economy. However we cannot take this progress for granted, particularly given the challenges which the economy is likely to face in the coming years.

In particular, the Irish economy is particularly exposed to the UK's decision to leave the EU. The immediate short run impact of this has been a loss of competitiveness, vis-à-vis the UK, as a result of the depreciation in sterling. Over the long run, any barrier to trade will impact on Irish growth. In addition to the impact of Brexit, potential changes in the international tax landscape, the risk of disruption to world trade and rising geopolitical tensions all have the potential to negatively impact the economic outlook over the coming years.

Given these challenges we need to build upon the progress we have already made, managing our public finances in a prudent manner and maintaining competitiveness-oriented policies so that the Irish economy is in the best possible position to weather any shocks that may emerge.

### **Inflation Rate**

76. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance if his Department has identified specific inflationary tendencies within the economy or has indicated plans to address such issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21677/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Inflation in Ireland has been subdued for several years. For example, on a Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices (HICP) basis, 2017 was the fifth consecutive year of inflation below 1 per cent. This phenomenon is not restricted to Ireland. Low inflation has been a feature of advanced economies in recent years. However, in 2017, inflation on a HICP basis across the euro area accelerated to 1.5 per cent, from 0.2 per cent in 2016.

This acceleration did not occur in Ireland, with inflation on a HICP basis averaging just 0.3 per cent in 2017. The divergence between inflation in the euro area and Ireland can in part be attributed to the impact of euro-sterling appreciation on consumer prices in Ireland. In turn this reflects the importance of the UK as a source of imports of consumer products.

While overall inflation has been subdued, services inflation has been robust, averaging 2.5 per cent last year. One important factor driving the increase in services inflation is strong growth in rent prices. Rent inflation averaged 6.7 per cent last year, a moderation from the 8.7 per cent increase in 2016. The pace of increase in rent prices, which in part reflects the ongoing shortage of housing, is of concern.

The Government's strategy for tackling housing issues is set out in Rebuilding Ireland – An Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness. The overarching objective of the plan is to increase overall housing supply to a more sustainable level of around 35,000 homes per year by 2020. The Government has committed to spending over €6 billion out to 2021 to implement the plan.

### **Economic Growth**

77. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which he remains satisfied regarding the ongoing progress of economic recovery; if he has identified particular issues requiring further attention; if he is satisfied that the economy remains well placed to maximise its potential' including job creation in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21678/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Recent economic indicators have generally been positive, indicating that the recovery is continuing in a sustainable manner.

Preliminary real GDP growth of 7.8 per cent was recorded for 2017, but this is heavily distorted by activity in the multinational sector. Modified domestic demand, which adjusts for distortions in the Irish economy, is up 4.0 per cent in 2017. Growth is broad based with net exports also contributing positively to growth last year.

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

Recent data indicate that momentum has continued into 2018:

- Expansion in the manufacturing and services sectors continued in April according to the Purchasing Managers' Index for the respective sectors

- Core retail sales, i.e., excluding car sales, are up 4.3 per cent in Q1 2018 y-o-y

- The Consumer Sentiment Index was 104.0 in April, well above its long run average.

- The seasonally-adjusted monthly unemployment rate for April was 5.9 per cent, down from 6.8 per cent in April 2017. As a result, the unemployment rate has fallen by almost two thirds since its peak of 16 per cent in early-2012.

As part of the 2018 Stability Programme Update, my Department forecast real GDP growth of 5.6 per cent this year. The labour market should benefit from this, with employment growth of 2.7 per cent (60,000 jobs) expected this year.

However, there are a number of risks at present including the UK's decision to exit the EU, tax reform in the US and an increase in protectionist measures. There are also domestic challenges such as housing supply pressures and the related challenge of maintaining competitiveness.

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

*Question No. 78 answered with Question No. 75.*

## **Inflation Rate**

79. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the degree to which he continues to monitor house property prices with a view to prevention of inflation through the sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21680/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** My Department continues to monitor developments in the wider property market, including trends in property prices, on an ongoing basis. According to the Central Statistics Office's Residential Property Price Index, national property prices increased by 0.7 per cent between February and March, and by 12.7 per cent on an annual basis. At the regional level, residential property prices in the 12 months to March 2018 increased by 12.1 per cent in Dublin and by 13.4 per cent outside of Dublin. Relative to peak, prices in Dublin are 23 per cent lower with those outside Dublin some 27.4 per cent lower.

The Government's primary response to the current issues in the housing market is contained in 'Rebuilding Ireland: An Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness'. The Action Plan sets out a comprehensive package of actionable measures designed to address the ongoing structural constraints within the construction sector and restore the housing market to a sustainable equilibrium. The implementation of these actions is monitored on an ongoing basis and reported publicly through quarterly progress reports.

## **Financial Services Regulation**

80. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will engage with the Central Bank with a view to the introduction of a statutory code of conduct to be operated by lenders and borrowers to provide particular recognition to the status of the borrowers that have continued to the best of their ability to make payments in respect of family home mortgages with a view to minimising the extent of family home repossessions while avoiding moral hazard but reducing the incidents of homelessness arising from policies as pursued by some lenders including unregulated third parties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21681/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Ensuring that the interests of consumers of financial services are protected is a key priority for the Government and the Central Bank. A key element of the Central Bank's role is ensuring that the consumer protection regulatory framework is fit for purpose and ensures that consumers best interests are protected.

Within the remit of the Central Bank's responsibilities for safeguarding stability and protecting consumers, its approach to mortgage arrears resolution is focussed on ensuring the fair treatment of borrowers. This is realised through a strong consumer protection framework and ensuring that lenders have appropriate arrears resolution strategies and operations in place.

The Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears (CCMA) forms part of the Central Bank's Consumer Protection Framework. It is a statutory Code first introduced by the Central Bank in February 2009, with the current CCMA becoming effective from 1 July 2013. The CCMA provides a strong consumer protection framework, aimed specifically at the process to be followed by relevant firms, to ensure borrowers in arrears or pre-arrears in respect of a mortgage loan secured on a primary residence are treated in a timely, transparent and fair manner.

Banks, retail credit firms and credit servicing firms servicing loans on behalf of unregulated loan owners are all required to comply with the CCMA. The overriding objective of the CCMA is to ensure the fair and transparent treatment of consumers in mortgage arrears or pre-arrears, and that there is due regard the fact that each case of mortgage arrears is unique and needs to be

considered on its own merits. The CCMA recognises that it is in the interests of borrowers and regulated firms to address financial difficulties as speedily, effectively and sympathetically as circumstances allow. It sets out the Mortgage Arrears Resolution Process (MARP), a four-step process that regulated entities must follow:

- Step 1: Communicate with borrower;
- Step 2: Gather financial information;
- Step 3: Assess the borrower's circumstances; and
- Step 4: Propose a resolution

Each regulated entity must consider the borrower's situation in the context of the solutions they provide, which may differ from firm to firm. The CCMA does not prescribe the solution which must be offered.

Under the CCMA, a regulated entity may only commence legal proceedings for repossession where it has made every reasonable effort to agree an alternative repayment arrangement (ARA) with the borrowers and other clear requirements are met or the borrower has been classified as not co-operating. This framework requires lenders to exhaust the options available from the suite of ARAs offered before taking action which may result in the borrower losing his/her home (whether by voluntary sale or repossession). During the legal process, borrowers have opportunities to re-engage with lenders to find a solution. In some circumstances, however, loss of ownership may be unavoidable.

In February this year, I wrote to the Governor of the Central Bank and requested that they carry out a review of the CCMA to ensure it remains as effective as possible. I have asked that the report be completed as soon as practically possible.

Finally, as the Deputy will be aware, most loan agreements include a clause that allows the original lender to sell the loan on to another firm. The Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing Firms) Act 2015 ("the 2015 Act") was introduced to fill the consumer protection gap where loans are sold by the original lender to an unregulated firm. Under the 2015 Act, if the firm who bought loans from the original lender is an unregulated firm, then the loans must be serviced by a 'credit servicing firm' which is regulated by the Central Bank. Credit Servicing Firms are typically firms that manage or administer credit agreements such as mortgages or other loans on behalf of unregulated entities.

Credit servicing firms must act in accordance with the requirements of Irish financial services law that applies to 'regulated financial service providers'. This ensures that consumers, whose loans are sold to another firm, maintain the same regulatory protections that they had prior to the sale, including under the various statutory Codes of Conduct issued by the Central Bank such as the Consumer Protection Code 2012, Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears 2013, and the SME Regulations. Contractual terms are not changed by the sale of the loan.

Over the last number of months, there has been a lot of concern regarding loan sales, specifically in relation to PTSB. Arising from this, Deputy Michael McGrath published a Bill on the regulation of loan owners. This Private Member's Bill is complex and there are multiple issues with it which need to be resolved. However, the Government supports the intent behind the Bill and has committed to assisting the Deputy in improving the Bill to make it more effective. Officials in my Department have been discussing the Bill with Fianna Fáil and are actively preparing amendments which will make the Bill effective and rectify technical drafting issues.

## Budget Targets

81. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which budgetary projections remain on target for the balance of 2018; the extent to which he expects adjustments to be required in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21682/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The recently published Stability Programme Update 2018 included an update of the fiscal outlook for 2019. The projected general government balance remains unchanged from Budget 2018 at 0.3 per cent of GDP.

Regarding the performance of taxation receipts, I would first caution that it is still too early in the tax collection calendar to discern any firm trends, which in turn underpins the decision to leave this year's tax forecast unchanged from Budget 2018.

Nonetheless, tax revenues to end-April are performing well, coming in slightly below profile by 1.4 per cent (€202 million). Furthermore, tax revenues are showing healthy year on year growth of 3.6 per cent (€516 million).

Total gross voted expenditure of €19,216 million to end-April was €74 million (0.4 per cent) below profile. This is made up of gross voted current expenditure running slightly ahead of expectations, 1.1 per cent (€192 million), chiefly due to a timing issue, and gross voted capital expenditure which is €266 million (19 per cent) below profile.

These forecasts will be assessed and adjusted accordingly as part of the Budget 2019 process this October.

Finally, I would like to remind the Deputy that performance against profile of main exchange items are discussed on an ongoing basis in the Fiscal Monitor. This is published on a monthly basis and is available for the Deputy's convenience *here* .

## Mortgage Book Sales

82. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance if provision will be made by a statutory means or otherwise to ensure that venture capital purchasers of loan books are required to comply with guidelines set down by the Central Bank and the need to ensure the ongoing accommodation of borrowers that continue to make consistent efforts to meet repayment requirements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21683/18]

86. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the steps he will take to protect homeowners and small business operators from being dispossessed by third party borrowers not covered by a reasonable code of conduct with particular reference to those that have continued to make payments to the best of their ability notwithstanding the fact that they did not cause or contribute to the economic recession; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21687/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 82 and 86 together.

Government policy has been that the sale of a loan book should not result in a loss of protections for borrowers. The Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing Firms) Act 2015 restored protections to borrowers by making credit servicing a regulated activity and requiring firms which undertook credit servicing to be authorised by the Central Bank. Under the Act, purchasers of these loan books must either be regulated by the Central Bank themselves or else

the loans must be serviced by a credit servicing firm who is regulated by the Central Bank.

The Act also prevented loan owners giving instructions to credit servicing firms which would be prohibited if the owner was regulated and also prohibited the credit servicing firm from implementing such instructions. Therefore, it is not possible for unregulated entities to act on behalf of lenders.

Regulated credit servicing firms and other regulated entities must comply with all relevant requirements of financial services legislation, including the regulatory requirements set out in the Central Bank's statutory Codes of Conduct and Regulations. These requirements include the Consumer Protection Code 2012 and the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears 2013 (CCMA).

Provision 56 of the CCMA provides that a regulated entity may only commence legal proceedings for repossession of a borrower's primary residence where the regulated entity has made every reasonable effort under the CCMA to agree an alternative repayment arrangement with the borrower or his/her nominated representative, and the specific timeframes set out in the CCMA have been adhered to or the borrower has been classified as not co-operating and notified in accordance with the CCMA.

I should also say that a customer who has a complaint against a regulated financial service provider which is not resolved by the provider's internal complaints mechanism may make a complaint to the independent Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman.

The Deputy may also be aware of a recent Private Member's Bill which would require the regulation of loan owners. The Government supports the intent behind the Bill and has committed to assisting the Deputy in improving the Bill to make it more effective.

### **Brexit Supports**

83. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which he continues to make provision for issues arising from Brexit in such a way as to maximise opportunities for the economy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21684/18]

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

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

Indeed, as we cannot control the international environment, the best way and most immediate policy under the Government's control to counter the likely negative economic impacts of Brexit is to prudently manage the public finances in order to ensure that Ireland's economy

continues to remain competitive in the face of future economic headwinds. In this context, the Government has taken a number of important steps to maximise opportunities for the economy and to prepare our economy for the challenges of Brexit, including in Budgets 2017 and 2018, the Action Plan for Jobs, the Ireland Connected trade and investment strategy, and the preparation of a new 10-year Capital Plan.

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

### **Banking Sector Regulation**

84. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which banks operating here have been penalised financially for their activities in other jurisdictions, some of which would seek to offload such responsibilities to customers here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21685/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Part IIIC of the Central Bank Act 1942, as amended, provides the Central Bank of Ireland with the power to administer sanctions in respect of the commission of prescribed contravention(s) by Regulated Financial Service Providers (RFSP) regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland, and by persons presently or formerly concerned in the management of RFSPs who have participated in the prescribed contravention(s) committed by the RFSP.

The Central Bank of Ireland is not in a position to comment on financial penalties imposed by regulators in other jurisdictions.

Further information on the Central Bank's Administrative Sanctions Procedure can be found on the Bank's website, available at the following link: [www.centralbank.ie/regulation/how-we-regulate/enforcement/administrative-sanctions-procedure](http://www.centralbank.ie/regulation/how-we-regulate/enforcement/administrative-sanctions-procedure).

### **Credit Availability**

85. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which at European level credit is provided to the economy for its contribution towards economic recovery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21686/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The European economy continues to grow at a solid pace, with the euro area having grown at its fastest rate in ten years in 2017. The recovery in growth has been accompanied by improved credit conditions and a rise in lending.

The provision of credit is an important driver of economic growth as credit is used to fund consumption and investment, while it is also a key transmission channel for monetary policy. In the euro area, lending growth turned positive in 2015 after contracting during the crisis, and has strengthened consistently since then. Loans to the euro area private sector rose by 3 percent on an annual basis in March 2018, reflecting continued increases in lending to both households and non-financial corporations (NFCs). In March, the growth rate of loans to households rose from 2.9 percent to 3.0 percent, while NFC loan growth rose from 3.2 percent to 3.3 percent.

In Ireland, credit has been slower to pick up following the crisis, however loans to the private sector have seen positive growth since November 2017. While this was initially driven by

positive growth in lending to households, lending to NFCs also began to grow in 2018.

There has been a moderation in European growth in the first quarter of 2017. Flash estimates showed quarterly GDP growth in the euro area slowed to 0.4 percent, from 0.7 percent in Q4 2017. While a moderation has yet to bear out in lending data, this highlights the need for continued monitoring of developments in the European economy and the factors driving growth, including lending conditions, consumption and investment. An appropriate balance of fiscal, monetary and structural reform policies is necessary to ensure sustainable growth is maintained.

*Question No. 86 answered with Question No. 82.*

### Economic Data

87. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the way in which Ireland's economic performance compares with other EU countries in the eurozone or outside; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21688/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** According to EUROSTAT, the statistical office of the European Union, Ireland was the fastest growing economy in the EU in 2017. First estimates show that real GDP growth in Ireland was 7.8 per cent in 2017 compared with real GDP growth in both the EU and euro area of 2.4 per cent. While headline GDP figures can be exaggerated in an Irish context, other indicators such as consumer spending, labour market developments and taxation receipts confirm the economy performed strongly last year.

According to the European Commission, Ireland is also expected to be among the fastest growing economies in Europe this year with GDP growth of 5.7 per cent in 2018 compared with growth of 2.3 per cent for both the EU and the euro area. This is similar to my Department's forecast of 5.6 per cent growth this year as set out in the Stability Programme Update 2018 published last month. The IMF is forecasting Ireland's economy to grow by 4.5 per cent in 2018 compared with global GDP growth of 3.9 per cent and growth of 2.4 per cent in the euro area.

The Government's priority is to ensure continued, sustainable economic growth in order to further increase living standards and reduce unemployment.

### Mortgage Interest Rates

88. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which mortgage interest rates applicable here compare with the rest of Europe; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21689/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Central Bank of Ireland has informed me that the most recently available statistics on interest rates charged on new mortgage business in the euro area are detailed in the table. These statistics are harmonised across the euro area, and relate to euro-denominated lending to euro area residents, broken by broad interest rate type; variable and fixed. There is no breakdown available for property type. Therefore, the attached table relates to rates for PDH, BTL and holiday homes.

New business (1) (%)	Total (2)	Variable (3)	Fixed
Country	2018-03	2018-03	2018-03
Austria	1.79	1.56	2.04

New business (1) (%)	Total (2)	Variable (3)	Fixed
Belgium	1.96	1.58	2.01
Cyprus	2.49	2.52	n/a
Germany	1.89	2.05	1.87
Estonia	2.42	2.16	4.24
Spain	1.97	1.62	2.17
Finland	0.92	0.90	1.82
France	1.58	1.51	1.58
Greece	2.74	2.69	3.14
Ireland	3.02	2.96	3.07
Ireland*	3.21	3.34	3.11
Italy	1.88	1.54	2.07
Lithuania	2.17	2.07	4.89
Luxembourg	1.79	1.56	1.97
Latvia	2.64	2.38	8.00
Malta	2.76	2.89	2.58
Netherlands	2.39	1.94	2.47
Portugal	1.49	1.51	1.47
Slovenia	2.45	1.98	2.86
Slovakia	1.65	1.75	1.65
Euro area	1.86	1.63	1.92

**Notes:**

\* These rates for IE exclude loan renegotiations. There is limited data availability of these rates for other euro area countries. Rates available on a comparable basis include renegotiations.

1. New business comprises all financial contracts which specify for the first time the interest rate, including all new (re)negotiations of existing loans. Detailed definition can be found [here](#) .

2. Euro-denominated loans for house purchase; total floating rate or initial rate fixation to euro area households (percentages per annum, rates on new business)

3. Euro-denominated loans for house purchase; floating rate or initial rate fixation of up to one year to euro area households (percentages per annum, rates on new business)

## Source:

- 'Total' and 'variable' rates can be downloaded from the ECB's user-friendly 'Euro area statistics' page [here](#). Select 'loan for house purchase, total' and 'loan for house purchase, x < 1Y'. Select 'Euro area' and 'Ireland' and click 'Download'. A link will appear under the series selected, and when clicked will open an excel file with all individual euro area countries rates from current month back to 2003. The caveat on the IE rate is that it impacted by renegotiations. A more relevant comparative source for IE is found in columns D and F in Table B.2.1, found [here](#).

- 'Fixed' rates by euro area country can be downloaded from [here](#). A more relevant comparative source for IE is found in columns D and F in Table B.2.1, found [here](#).

- Specific rates for Ireland by property type are available in Table B.3.1 of the Central Bank of Ireland Retail Interest tables [here](#), for which there are no comparative euro area rates.

## **Animal Welfare**

89. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if wardens in the Phoenix Park are sufficiently trained to euthanise an injured deer in the event of an accident; the way in which this process operates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21641/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** The Commissioners of Public Works employ a Deer Keeper in the Phoenix Park. He is fully trained and carries out humane dispatches of deer when required following the OPW Deer Safe Operating Procedures which have been approved by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

## **Public Sector Staff Retirements**

90. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the position regarding raising the compulsory retirement age from 65 to 70 years of age for public servants that were recruited before 1 April 2004; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21691/18]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As the Deputy is aware, on 5 December 2017, the Government agreed that the compulsory retirement age of most public servants recruited before 1 April 2004 should be increased to age 70. Primary legislation is required for this change to be implemented. The Attorney General's Office has been requested to prioritise the drafting of the necessary legislation so that the new compulsory retirement age will become effective as soon as possible.

It is not possible to determine the length of time it will take for a Bill to be drafted and pass through both Houses of the Oireachtas, given the need for meticulous drafting, ongoing detailed policy considerations, and the scheduling requirements of the Houses of the Oireachtas. However, the drafting process is underway and the Bill is on the list of priority legislation for publication in the current session. Indeed, I understand that the drafting of the legislation is significantly advanced with an expected publication date, subject to Government approval, of next month.

In order to make some accommodation for public servants who reach the age of 65 in the period between the Government Decision of 5 December and the commencement of the necessary legislation, the Government approved some limited interim arrangements which became effective from the date of the Government Decision. The interim arrangements (which have to respect the current statutory position of the compulsory retirement age of 65) will, through retire and re-hire, enable pre 2004 public servants who reach the age of 65 to remain in employment until they reach the age of eligibility for the State Pension (Contributory), which is currently 66. Details of these interim implementation arrangements have been put in place by the relevant sectors.

## **Caiteachas Ranna**

91. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Pearse Doherty** den Aire Caiteachais Phoiblí agus Athchóirithe maidir le Ceist Dála Uimhir 100 ar an 9ú Bealtaine 2018, cad chuige gur i mBéarla a freagraíodh an cheist seo. [21502/18]

16 May 2018

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Níorbh fhéidir an PQ a fhreagairt i nGaeilge sa tréimhse ama toisc srianta ama. Tá an freagra 9ú Bealtaine aistrithe go Gaeilge anois thíos:

“Ba é ceann de na cuspóirí ar bhain le Ceadúnas don Chrannchur Náisiúnta do thréimshe 20 bliain a dhíol ná fáltais láithreach a ghiniúint don Stát. Úsáideadh an €405, fáltas ó dhíol an cheadúnais, le tionscadail chaiteachais a mhaoiniú agus laghdaíodh an gá le méaduithe cánacha ag an am sin dá bharr.

“Is d’fhreagracht na Ranna áirithe é an leithroinnt maoiniúcháin ó na fo-cheannteidil atá maoinithe ag an gCrannchur Náisiúnta sin a leagan amach. Tá na Ranna agus Gníomhairreachtaí áirithe leagtha amach i bhfoscscríbhinn 1 sa Mheastacháin Athbhreithnithe go bliaintiúil.

“Foilsíonn An Roinn Cultúir, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta eolas atá bainteach leis an gcaiteachas arna pháirt-chistiú ag an gCrannchur Náisiúnta ar a suíomh gréasáin go bliaintiúil. Nasc thíos. Déantar cur síos ar na fo-cheannteidil A9, B3 agus C4 mar ‘pháirt-chistiú ag an gCrannchur Náisiúnta’ sa Mheastacháin Athbhreithnithe. Baineann an t-eolas faoi C4 go díreach leis an nGaeilge. [www.chg.gov.ie/about/finance-evaluation/national-lottery-funding/](http://www.chg.gov.ie/about/finance-evaluation/national-lottery-funding/).

“Tá an nasc don Tuarascáil 2014 thíos: [www.chg.gov.ie/app/uploads/2015/07/National\\_Lottery\\_Funding\\_2014.pdf](http://www.chg.gov.ie/app/uploads/2015/07/National_Lottery_Funding_2014.pdf) ”.

### **Garda Station Refurbishment**

92. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the Garda stations in the Limerick Garda division that received refurbishment and maintenance in excess of €5,000 in 2017 and to date in 2018 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21518/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** I can confirm that the Office of Public Works (OPW) has carried out works on at least seven Garda Stations in the Limerick Garda Division in 2017 and 2018.

It was not possible to compile all the details requested in the timeframe for this response. The information requested will be furnished directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Flood Relief Schemes Status**

93. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the progress to date in respect of a scheme (details supplied); when work is expected to commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21538/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** The Lower Morell River Flood Management Scheme is being progressed by Kildare County Council (KCC) as the Contracting Authority with funding provided by the Office of Public Works (OPW).

The proposed Scheme along with an Environmental Impact Assessment Report was submitted to An Bord Pleanála (ABP) by the Council on 15 September, 2017. Approval for the scheme was received from ABP on 27 April 2018.

The Scheme comprises:

- construction or restoration of over 9,000 metres of sloped embankments;
- construction of up to 480 metres of flood walls to direct the flood water away from high risk areas;
- realignment of two streams; and up to 11 culvert alterations/upgrades.

Construction is expected to commence in August / September 2018 and will be undertaken over three years by OPW direct labour. Initial works will commence on site at the downstream end of the project. These works will include up to two kilometres of earthen embankments and the construction of reinforced concrete structures.

Further information and a detailed description of the proposed scheme can be accessed on the Lower Morell Flood Management Scheme website [www.morellfms.ie](http://www.morellfms.ie).

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

94. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the grounds on which a child with Down syndrome can be refused the July provision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21498/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The July Education Programme (or July Provision Grant Scheme) provides funding towards an extended school year for children with a severe or profound general learning disability and/or children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) enrolled in recognised schools.

The eligibility criteria and the terms and conditions for the July Provision Grant Scheme 2018 are set out in the Information Note on the scheme which was published with the application forms and is available on the Department's website at [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie).

The National Council for Special Education's Policy Advice on Educational Provision for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders was published in July 2016.

In developing this policy advice, the NCSE reviewed my Department's July Provision Grant Scheme. The NCSE consulted widely with parents, professionals and other stakeholders and interested parties while also conducting research.

The Policy advice, which is available on the NCSE's website, recommends that relevant stakeholders should discuss the development of a national day activity scheme that provides a structured, safe, social environment for all students with complex special educational needs for one month of the summer holidays.

My Department has convened an Implementation Group with representatives of the National Council for Special Education, the National Educational Psychological Service, the Inspectorate and external representatives to ensure that the Report's recommendations are fully and appropriately considered. The work of the Implementation Group is ongoing.

My Department officials are engaging with officials in the Department of Social Protection, the Department of Health and other relevant stakeholders in regard to implementing the recommendations, including those in relation to July Provision.

While that work is underway, there are no plans to extend the existing July Provision Grant Scheme to all children with Special Educational Needs and indeed this was not a recommendation of the NCSE in their policy advice.

## Special Educational Needs Staff

95. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an appeal for a SNA in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21501/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) for allocating a quantum of Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support for each school annually taking into account the assessed care needs of children qualifying for SNA support enrolled in the school.

The NCSE allocates SNA support to schools in accordance with the criteria set out in Department Circular 0030/2014, which is available on the Department's website at [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie), in order that students who have care needs can access SNA support as and when it is needed. My Department's policy is to ensure that every child who is assessed as needing SNA support will receive access to such support.

In considering applications for SNA supports for individual pupils, the SENOs take account of the pupils' needs and consider the resources available to the school to identify whether additionality is needed or whether the school might reasonably be expected to meet the needs of the pupils from its current level of resources. SNAs are not allocated to individual children but to schools as a school based resource.

The deadline for applying for SNA support for the 2018/19 school year was extended from 28 February to 7 March 2018 due to the effects of adverse weather. The NCSE continue to accept applications for SNA Support after this date and these will be processed according to the date of receipt. The NCSE aim to respond to valid applications received later this month.

The NCSE Appeals Process may be invoked by a parent or a school where it is considered that a child was not granted access to SNA support on the grounds that Department policy was not met in accordance with Circular 0030/2014.

Schools may also appeal a decision, where the school considers that the NCSE, in applying Department policy, has not allocated the appropriate level of SNA supports to the school to meet the special educational and/or care needs of the children concerned.

As the question to which the Deputy refers relates to a specific school, the matter will be referred to the NCSE for direct reply.

## School Accommodation Provision

96. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application by a school (details supplied) for an extra classroom due to overcrowding. [21509/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I wish to advise that my Department has approved the provision of additional temporary accommodation, at the school referred to by the Deputy, to address the school's immediate accommodation requirements. The school has been advised of my Department's decision.

## Capitation Grants

97. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to restore the capitation grant to €200 per pupil for primary schools; the timeline in relation to same; his further plans to increase the capitation grant to match the costs of running a primary school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21519/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The level of funding provided to schools and the drivers of costs at school level are kept under review by my Department.

Initiatives in order to assist with the reduction of costs at school level and management of finances are in place such as the services provided by the Schools Procurement Unit and the Financial Services Support Unit.

I also recognise the need to improve capitation funding for schools having regard to the reductions that were necessary over recent years.

Restoring capitation funding as resources permit is one of the actions included in the Action Plan for Education.

Budget 2018 marked the second year of major reinvestment in the education sector, as we continue to implement the Action Plan for Education, which has the central aim to make the Irish Education and Training service the best in Europe within a decade. In 2018, the budget for the Department of Education increased by €554 million to over €10 billion. Through budget 2017 and Budget 2018, we are now investing €1 billion more in education.

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

The Deputy may wish to note that schools have the flexibility to use capitation funding provided for general running costs and ancillary funding provided for caretaking and secretarial services as a common grant which is outlined in Circular 40/2009.

### **Minor Works Scheme**

98. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to establish the minor works grant on a permanent basis in view of the uncertainty experienced by schools with the minor works grant being announced at a later date each year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21520/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Minor Works Grant was first introduced in 1997 and since then has issued to primary schools each school year with the exception of the school year 2012/2013. The grant most recently issued to all primary schools last December in respect of the school year 2017/2018. The payment of the Minor Works Grant is not confined to any particular date and can be issued during any month of the school year. For the 2002/2003 school year, part of the grant was paid in May 2003, with the balance in October 2003.

With regards to the Minor Works Grant 2018/2019, it is intended that the grant will issue no later than January 2019.

My Department recognises the importance of the Minor Works Grant to primary schools. The National Development Plan 2018-2027 signals a gradual ramping up in capital expenditure in the schools sector over the coming years. In that context, and as part of our longer term infrastructural planning, my Department would intend to put the Minor Works Grant on an annual footing and to provide greater certainty to schools on the timing of payment.

### **Summer Works Scheme Applications**

99. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 147 of 8 May 2018, if there is a live application in place for a school (details supplied) under the summer works scheme; if it is one of the remaining schools approved for works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21531/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I can confirm to the Deputy that the school in question applied for funding under the Summer Works Scheme, under Category 9 - Curricular Requirement Works. The Summer Works Scheme (SWS) is designed to allow schools to carry out small and medium sized building works that will improve and upgrade existing school buildings.

As advised, the Summer Works Scheme is a multi-annual scheme in respect of which 1,650 schools submitted applications. To date almost €80 million has been allocated in respect of over 635 schools applications in Categories 1-6 that have been approved. In that regard it is expected over €25 million will be expended in respect of approved projects in 2018.

Over 700 applications in categories 7-10, including an application from the school referred to, that are seeking funding of over €50 million, remain to be assessed.

### **Schools Building Projects Administration**

100. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the appointment of an architect to a school project (details supplied) will be prioritised in order that the school can proceed to planning without further delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21540/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Invitation to Tender documents for a replacement architect for the major building project at the school referred to by the Deputy were issued on 11 May 2018.

The latest date for the return of Tenders is 28 May 2018. The Assessment of the Tenders will then take place.

Planning Permission for the major building project was received from Fingal County Council on 21 January 2015.

### **Education and Training Boards**

101. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the organisations he has specified as having a special interest in education and training as per section 30(11)(a) of the Education and Training Boards Act 2013; the process for inclusion on the list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21552/18]

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

Section 30 (1) of the Education and Training Boards Act 2013 provides for the composition of each Board, as follows: 12 members elected by the relevant local authority or local authorities; 2 education and training board staff members elected by staff members; 2 members appointed by the Board from nominees of the National Parents' Council; 5 members appointed by the Board from bodies specified by the Minister which have a special interest in, or knowledge of, education.

In accordance with Section 30(11)(a) of the Act, the bodies to be specified must include at least one body from each of the following categories: (i) bodies representative of business, industry and employers; (ii) bodies representative of learners; (iii) bodies representative of persons engaged in the management of, or leadership in, recognised schools. A Board is required to appoint at least one member from each of these categories and, of the 5 persons appointed from these bodies, at least two must be women and least two must be men. All must reside within the functional area of the Board. The 16 other members of the Board will make the appointments in accordance with these requirements.

The bodies specified by the Minister of Education and Skills In accordance with Section 30(11)(a) of the ETB Act 2013 are as follows:

1 Bodies representative of business, industry and employers

- Chambers Ireland
- Irish Small and Medium Enterprises Association (ISME)
- Irish Business and Employers' Confederation (IBEC)

2 Bodies representative of Learners

- AONTAS (National Adult Learning Organisation)
- National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA)

3 Bodies representative of persons engaged in the management of, or leadership in, recognised schools

- Joint Managerial Body;
- Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools;
- National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals;

4 Bodies which are not in the three designated categories.

- Youth Work Ireland
- Scouting Ireland
- INOU
- Irish Second Level Students Union
- Irish Congress of trade unions (ICTU)
- Foras na Gaeilge (to cooperate with Udaras na Gaeltachta in Gaeltacht areas)
- National Youth Council of Ireland

- Foróige
- Disability Federation of Ireland
- AHEAD

### **Apprenticeship Programmes**

102. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the minimum age and educational qualifications required by those seeking to apply for a place on an apprenticeship programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21553/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** In order to be eligible to undertake an apprenticeship an applicant must be employed by a SOLAS approved employer and be at least 16 years of age.

In the case of craft apprenticeships an applicant must have a minimum of grade D in five subjects in the Junior Certificate Examination or an approved equivalent or have successfully completed an approved pre-apprenticeship course. Three years' work experience gained over sixteen years of age in a relevant designated industrial activity is also acceptable.

The minimum entry requirements for each of the eleven new consortia led apprenticeships that are currently operational vary depending on the apprenticeship and are available on the website [www.apprenticeship.ie](http://www.apprenticeship.ie).

### **Apprenticeship Programmes**

103. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the measures he is taking to promote access to apprenticeship programmes for those with fewer opportunities and that may be subject to social and or economic disadvantage; if measures similar to the third level access programmes will be considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21554/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** As set out in our Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship in Ireland, SOLAS, in conjunction with my Department, is currently reviewing pathways to participation in apprenticeship for a range of under-represented groups. The review will identify any barriers that may exist to participation in an apprenticeship programme for these groups and make recommendations for the future. The purpose of the review is to ensure that our national apprenticeship system is more reflective of the range and diversity of our population and more inclusive of diverse backgrounds and abilities. The review will be completed by end of June and any recommendations made will be implemented quickly.

In addition, a digital campaign to promote apprenticeship is now under way with a dedicated Twitter feed #Generation Apprenticeship, a new apprenticeship website [www.apprenticeship.ie](http://www.apprenticeship.ie), an Apprenticeship Ireland Facebook page and a LinkedIn page. The campaign seeks to promote the values of the apprenticeship model for both employers and prospective apprentices. The campaign has also been designed to influence parents, teachers and potential apprentices on the career paths and further educational opportunities arising from apprenticeship programmes.

104. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason, five months after the publication of the report of the GMIT working group on the future of the Mayo campus, none of the recommendations contained in the report has been acted upon and or implemented; and the timeframe for implementation of same. [21571/18]

105. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when an external facilitator will be appointed to oversee the implementation of the recommendations of the report of the GMIT working group on the future of the Mayo campus in view of the fact this was promised five months ago. [21572/18]

106. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a head of campus for the Mayo campus of GMIT will be appointed. [21573/18]

107. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason the recruitment process that commenced in 2018 for the head of the Mayo campus of GMIT was stalled or failed; the reason no head of campus was appointed; the plans to recruit a head of campus; if a new recruitment process will commence; and if so, when. [21574/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Government is committed to the future sustainability of the Castlebar Campus of Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT). This is the reason why I established the Working Group in March 2017 to develop a plan that would safeguard the future of the Castlebar campus.

The Report of the Working Group was published in December 2017. It provides a wide-ranging assessment of the context within which the Campus is currently operating, and outlines a proposed vision for the future of the Mayo Campus. It also provides a strategic and comprehensive plan to address the financial and sustainability issues which have been experienced by the GMIT Mayo Campus in recent years.

The Working Group recommendations are primarily for GMIT to implement. However, there are recommendations that relate specifically to my Department for action. In response to this my Department has prioritised these recommendations including the provision of ring fenced funding for the Castlebar campus for each of the next five years while the plan is being implemented. I wish to advise that the provision of this additional funding is contingent on GMIT progressing the implementation of the recommendations of the report, and is subject to review by the HEA.

My Department and the HEA are working with GMIT to ensure that the other recommendations are being progressed. These include the appointment of an external facilitator and the appointment of a head of campus for the Mayo campus.

I understand that the recruitment campaign for the head of campus will be initiated by GMIT shortly. A previous recruitment process had to be cancelled by GMIT.

The appointment of an independent external facilitator who will oversee the transition to the new structural and operational arrangements is a significant recommendation. The facilitator will play an important role in supporting the implementation of a number of the other Working Group recommendations. The procurement of this expertise will be initiated shortly by GMIT.

GMIT has established a sub committee to ensure the implementation of the recommendations of the report. This committee and GMIT issue regular updates on progress to the HEA who will continue to oversee the implementation of the recommendations of the report.

I would like to again assure the Deputy that my Department and the HEA will continue to work with GMIT on ensuring that the recommendations of the Working Group are implemented

as soon as possible, and with appropriate consultation with relevant stakeholders, to ensure the future sustainability of the Castlebar campus.

### **Emergency Works Scheme Eligibility**

108. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a school (details supplied); the reason for refusal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21576/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The school to which the Deputy refers recently submitted an appeal to my Department requesting a review of its application for funding under the Emergency Works Grant Scheme to address roof issues. This review has been carried out and it has been decided that a member of my Department's Professional & Technical team should visit the school and report on the matter. The visit will take place as soon as possible. Following receipt of the report a final decision will issue directly to the school authority.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

109. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the refurbishment and the provision of an extension for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21578/18]

110. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the commencement date for a prefabricated replacement for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21579/18]

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

I understand that the technical assessment process in respect of the project (to include the extension, refurbishment and prefab replacement) has been completed and the Project Brief is now being finalised. In that context, my Department will be in further contact with the school shortly in relation to the next steps to be taken to initiate the architectural planning process for the project concerned.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

111. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of planned school building works at a school (details supplied); and the timeframe for the completion of these works. [21584/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Deputy will be aware that a building project for the school to which he refers is included in my Department's Capital Programme.

I wish to advise the Deputy that the Schedules of Accommodation for the proposed project have issued to the school and my Department is currently finalising the project brief with the aim of progressing the project into the architectural planning process at an early date. My De-

partment will be in direct contact with the school authority in this regard.

### **Schools Site Acquisitions**

112. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there are other issues that may delay the legal process of transfer of property for the new build at a school (details supplied); and if so, the details of same. [21590/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The conveyancing process in relation to a site for this school building project is currently underway. As is the case with any specific site acquisition, it would not be appropriate for my Department to provide detailed information on the conveyancing process.

### **Special Educational Needs Staff Data**

113. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of resource teachers recruited in each of the years 2005 to 2017 and to date in 2018, by county, in tabular form. [21595/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I wish to advise the Deputy that DES Circular 0013/2017 for primary schools and 0014/2017 for post primary schools were published on 7 March 2017.

These Circulars set out the details of the new model for allocating special education teachers to schools.

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

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

Allocations based on the school profiles were issued to all schools on 7 March, 2017.

The aim of this new model is to deliver better outcomes for children with special educational needs. Substantial research, analysis, consultation with service users and stakeholders, and piloting have gone in to the development of this model and all of the evidence points to the fact that this new system will deliver better outcomes for children.

No school, has lost supports as a result of the implementation of the new model. In addition, no school received an allocation, for the support of pupils with complex needs, less than the allocation they received to support such pupils during the 2016/17 school year.

An additional 900 teaching posts have been provided in the 2017/2018 school year to support the introduction of this new allocation model. The provision of an additional 900 teaching posts is a very significant investment in the provision of additional teaching support for pupils with special educational needs in our schools.

The additional funding provided additional supports to over 1300 schools who identified as needing additional supports as a result of the new model while ensuring that no school received a reduced allocation.

The numbers of learning support and resource teachers from 2009 to 2017, and Special Education Teachers in 2017/2018 are set out in the tables.

For the 2017/18 school year to date, 13,306 additional special education teaching posts have been allocated, of which 13,281 have been allocated to schools, with 25 posts having been allocated to the NCSE to develop support services for schools.

Due to the manner in which the allocation of resource teaching posts was recorded prior to 2009, where additional allocations were only made to schools once all surplus allocations in schools were accounted for, accurate details of the resource teaching allocations made prior to 2009 are not available.

Details of the breakdown of allocations for special education posts on a per county basis for the years 2012/13 to 2017/18 are available at <http://ncse.ie/statistics>

Due to the manner in which data was collected and recorded prior to 2012, details of the breakdown of allocations for special education posts on a per county basis are not available for the years prior to the 2012/13 school year.

### General Allocation Model Learning Support and Resource Teaching posts

School Year	GAM LS Posts	RT Posts	Total
2009/10	4454	4869	9323
2010/11	4454	5175	9629
2011/12	4475	5265	9740
2012/13	4863	5265	10128
2013/14	4882	5721	10603
2014/15	4954	6203	11157
2015/16	5015	6821	11836
2016/17	5072	7429	12501

### New Special Education Allocation Model

Year	Primary	Post Primary	Total
2017/18*	9321	4049	13306

\*As at March 2018. Includes 25 posts allocated to the NCSE to develop support services for schools. The remaining 94 post which have yet to be allocated are available to allocate to schools for appeals, demographic growth, or where exceptional circumstances arise in schools.

### School Accommodation Provision

114. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application for an additional classroom and resource room for a school (details supplied); if the application will be prioritised in view of the rising projected pupil numbers for the school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21600/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department received an application, in recent weeks, from the school referred to for the provision of additional classroom and resource accommodation. The application is currently under consideration and my Department will be in direct contact with the school authorities when the assessment process has concluded.

### **Schools Establishment**

115. **Deputy Kate O'Connell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans for an Educate Together or other non-denominational secondary school to serve children in Dublin 8 and 12; and if the recently announced schools in Dublin will include Dublin 8 and 12 in their catchment areas. [21601/18]

**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.

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

While the announcement did not include a new post-primary school for the Dublin 8 or Ballyfermot-Dublin12 school planning areas, a new 1,000 pupil post-primary school was announced to be established in 2020 as a regional solution to serve the Dublin 6-Clonskeagh and Dublin 6W school planning areas which are adjacent to Dublin 8 and 12, and a new 600 pupil post-primary school was announced to be established in 2021 in the Dublin2-Dublin4 school planning area which is adjacent to the Dublin 8 area. In addition, a new 1,000 pupil post-primary school is scheduled to be established in 2018 to serve the Dublin2-Dublin4, Dublin 6-Clonskeagh and Dublin 8 school planning areas as a regional solution.

### **School Inspection Reports**

116. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the concerns which have been raised regarding the school management by teachers at a school (details supplied) in County Louth. [21617/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** My Department's Inspectorate carried out a Whole-School Evaluation in Scoil Eoin Báiste National School, Castletown, Dundalk, Co. Louth in October 2017 and this report was published on my Department's website [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie) in January 2018.

The report identified a number of recommendations for the school where improvement is required.

Responsibility for implementing recommendations in an inspection report rest, in the first instance, with the management and patron of a school. As Section 15 of the Education makes clear, it is the duty of the board of a school to manage the school on behalf of the school's patron and for the benefit of the students and their parents.

### School Transport Provision

117. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the privatising of bus routes (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21628/18]

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

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

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

In this regard, Bus Éireann has advised that the school transport service referred to by the Deputy is currently out to tender.

Bus Éireann has also confirmed that the scheduled public bus services referred to will continue to operate as per the scheduled timetable

### Capitation Grants

118. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the full year cost of increasing the capitation grant at primary and secondary level by 5%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21631/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The estimated cost of increasing the capitation grant at primary and secondary level by 5% is provided in the following table:

#### Estimated full year cost of 5% increase in capitation funding

School	Amount
Primary Schools	€5.0m
Post-Primary Schools	€4.7m

Budget 2018 marked the second year of major reinvestment in the education sector, as we continue to implement the Action Plan for Education, which has the central aim to make the

Irish Education and Training service the best in Europe within a decade. In 2018, the budget for the Department of Education increased by €554 million to over €10 billion. Through budget 2017 and Budget 2018, we are now investing €1 billion more in education.

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

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

### **School Staff**

119. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a classroom teacher for a school (details supplied) will be retained; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21656/18]

121. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on a matter regarding a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21694/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The criteria used for the allocation of teaching posts is published annually on the Department website. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September.

The staffing schedule operates in a clear and transparent manner and treats all similar types of schools equally irrespective of location.

The staffing schedule also includes an appeals mechanism for schools to submit a staffing appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board. Details of the appeal process and application form are available in Circular 0010/2018, “Staffing Arrangements in Primary Schools for the 2018/19 School Year”, which is published on the Department website.

My Department has received a staffing appeal from the school referred to by the Deputies. The Primary Staffing Appeals Board will meet to review appeals for the 2018/19 school year in the coming weeks and the school will be notified of the outcome of the appeal.

The Primary Staffing Appeals Board operates independently of the Department and its decision is final.

### **Schools Refurbishment**

120. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to finance deep energy retrofit of schools over the coming years to meet climate change rules. [21663/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Over the lifetime of the NDP, Government and EU energy efficiency and climate change legislation will require up-

grading of the energy performance of existing schools. My Department, with SEAI, completed an energy pilot project in 2017 for the energy upgrade of ten existing schools to establish opportunities and innovative delivery models, as well as a menu of best practice retrofit options. My Department has agreed to collaborate with SEAI on the delivery of a further National Energy Efficiency Upgrade Pilot Programme for Schools in 2018 and 2019 on a matching funding basis. This builds on the successful pilot programme completed last year.

The shared objectives of the next phase of the pilot programme are to implement a range of energy efficiency measures in a number of typical schools and to test a variety of approaches with a view to developing a scalable model of energy efficiency retrofits in the school sector to be rolled out into the future. In this regard, it is envisaged that deep energy retrofits will need to be factored into future school refurbishment programmes during the lifetime of the NDP.

*Question No. 121 answered with Question No. 119.*

### **School Staff Appeals Mechanism**

122. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an appeal by a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21705/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The criteria used for the allocation of teaching posts is published annually on the Department website. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September.

The staffing schedule operates in a clear and transparent manner and treats all similar types of schools equally irrespective of location.

The staffing schedule also includes an appeals mechanism for schools to submit a staffing appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board. Details of the appeal process and application form are available in Circular 0010/2018, “Staffing Arrangements in Primary Schools for the 2018/19 School Year”, which is published on the Department website.

My Department has received a staffing appeal from the school referred to by the Deputy. The Primary Staffing Appeals Board will meet to review appeals for the 2018/19 school year in the coming weeks and the school will be notified of the outcome of the appeal.

The Primary Staffing Appeals Board operates independently of the Department and its decision is final.

### **Garda Transport Data**

123. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of vehicles attached to the Limerick Garda roads policing unit in each of the years 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21516/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Government’s Capital Plan 2016 – 2021 provides €46 million for investment in the Garda fleet, to ensure that An Garda Síochána has a modern, effective and fit-for-purpose fleet and this is in addition to the investment of almost €30 million in the period 2013 to 2015. In total, in the period 2013 to 2017, almost €44 million has been invested in the fleet.

As the Deputy will appreciate, decisions in relation to the provision and allocation of Garda vehicles are a matter for the Garda Commissioner in the light of his identified operational demands and the availability of resources and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

I have however been informed by the Garda authorities that 11 vehicles have been allocated to Limerick Divisions Roads Policing Units in each of the years 2016, 2017 and 2018 to date, comprising six cars, one van, three motorbikes and one 4x4.

### **Court Sittings**

124. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the steps being taken to reduce the delay for the trial of criminal proceedings in the Dublin Circuit Court; if further judges will be assigned to conduct criminal trials on the circuit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21522/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy is aware, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service, which is independent in exercising its functions. Furthermore, the scheduling of court cases and the allocation of Circuit Court business is a matter for the President of the Circuit Court and the presiding judge who are, under the Constitution, independent in the exercise of their judicial functions.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has advised that the waiting time for the hearing of criminal trials in the Dublin Circuit Court increased to 14 months by the end of 2017 and that this is directly attributable to the number of very long trials coming before the courts, including some particularly complex cases.

The Courts Service has further advised that delays in the hearing of cases can occur for a number of reasons, many of which are outside the control of the Courts and the Courts Service, for example, the unavailability of a witness or vital evidence, delays in the furnishing of reports or because the parties and/or legal practitioners are not ready to proceed on allocated dates. This gives rise to adjournments which can have a major impact on the time taken to complete the hearing of a case and on the number of cases which can be disposed of in a court sitting.

The Courts Service has informed me that the President of the Circuit Court assigns 6 judges to criminal business in Dublin and that every effort is made to maintain the assignment of 6 judges to dealing with criminal business. Waiting times are kept under ongoing review and the Courts Service continues to work with the President of the Circuit Court to support the efficient disposal of court cases, to ensure that waiting times are kept to a minimum and to target judicial resources at the areas of greatest need.

### **Compulsory Purchase Orders**

125. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the most recent attempt at arbitration in respect of the abandoned town centre, Naas, County Kildare took place; when the process will be reactivated; if a reason has been provided regarding the extraordinary delays in respect of the conclusion of the process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21575/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy is aware,

when the State compulsorily acquires land for public purposes and there is a dispute between the vendor and the purchaser regarding the amount of compensation which should be paid, the vendor may apply to the Land Values Reference Committee (comprising the Chief Justice, the President of the High Court and the President of the Society of Chartered Surveyors of Ireland) for the appointment of a Property Arbitrator to arbitrate on the amount to be paid. Property Arbitrators are appointed under section 2(1) of the Property Values (Arbitration and Appeals) Act, 1960 by the Land Values Reference Committee and all property arbitrations are required by law to be held in public.

In order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have made enquiries and the Courts Service has informed me that there is currently one full-time property arbitrator and seven temporary part-time arbitrators available to be nominated to act in cases in which the property arbitrator is unable to act. The Courts Service is satisfied that this is sufficient to meet the demand for services in this area.

Neither my Department nor the Courts Service has any function in relation to the work programme of property arbitrators who are appointed by the Land Values Reference Committee and therefore is not in a position to provide the detail requested by the Deputy above.

### **Garda Stations**

126. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to a campaign for a new Garda station (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21629/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Deputy will appreciate that the Garda Commissioner is primarily responsible for the effective and efficient use of the resources available to An Garda Síochána, including responsibility for the formulation of proposals in relation to the opening and closing of Garda stations.

In addition, the programme of replacement and refurbishment of Garda accommodation is progressed by the Garda authorities working in close cooperation with the Office of Public Works (OPW), which has responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation. This includes identifying and progressing any necessary remedial or refurbishment works required at individual stations. As Minister, I have no direct role in these matters.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Garda Síochána Building and Refurbishment Programme 2016 – 2021, which is an ambitious 5 year building Programme reflecting the priorities of An Garda Síochána, will benefit some 30 locations throughout the State. I am informed by the Garda authorities that the Programme does not include the provision of a new Garda station in Tallaght, and I further understand from the Garda authorities that there are no plans to undertake a major refurbishment of this Garda station.

However, I am informed by Garda authorities that the Programme does include the provision of a Property and Exhibit Store (PEMS) at Tallaght Garda Station and that the development of this property storage facility is ongoing in conjunction with the OPW.

Finally, I am informed by the Garda authorities that to assist with accommodation in the existing Garda station in Tallaght, the OPW has provided additional accommodation for An Garda Síochána in close proximity to the station, at the Plaza Office Complex, Tallaght. I understand that An Garda Síochána took up occupation of this accommodation in October 2009.

## Family Reunification

127. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the family reunification humanitarian assistance programme will be launched; the reason the programme was not launched in April 2018 as had previously been indicated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21640/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** Last Saturday, 12 May, the Minister of State with special responsibility for Equality, Immigration and Integration, David Stanton TD, and I launched the first call for nominations under the Irish Humanitarian Admission Programme 2. The scheme referred to by the Deputy is called the IHAP.

I am pleased that the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP) has completed its commitment to relocate people from Greece and that, since its inception, the overall programme has also surpassed its original commitments on resettlement. The second phase of the programme has now begun with increased commitments on resettlement and the commencement of the new Humanitarian Admission Programme. Operating under discretionary Ministerial powers, the Programme will provide an opportunity to people in Ireland, who have immediate family members affected by the unprecedented scale of mass displacement to nominate family members under this programme.

Under the IHAP, I wish to prioritise immediate family members in the most vulnerable situations internationally and following consultations with the UNHCR, persons from the following countries will be eligible under the scheme: Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Somalia, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Myanmar, Eritrea, and Burundi. These countries comprise the top ten major source countries of refugees listed in the UNHCR Annual Global Trends Report.

The IHAP is a humane and flexible response to the needs of those fleeing high-risk areas, and will facilitate their reunion with family members in Ireland. The Programme reaffirms the Government's commitment and ability to respond positively to humanitarian crises. Persons admitted under this programme will be a key part of the IRPP and will receive a status in their own right rather than a dependency status on their family member. This is important for their long term integration and sense of belonging in our communities.

The first call for proposals runs from 14 May until 30 June 2018 and further open calls will be scheduled in 2018 and throughout 2019. Full details of the programme and the relevant form are available on the INIS website ([www.inis.gov.ie](http://www.inis.gov.ie)) under the 'Asylum' heading.

## Prison Service Staff

128. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on the senior management of the Prison Service; the level of engagement he has had with them; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21650/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will be aware the work being carried out by the Irish Prison Service, led by the Director General, Michael Donnellan, and his senior management team, speaks for itself. I regularly meet the Director General, senior management and staff on my visits to prisons and at prisons related events. The Director General is a member of my Department's Management Board and raises any developments and issues of concern there and in the regular meetings I hold with the Management Board as a group. My officials are also in contact with prison management on a daily

basis in relation to a host of issues.

There has been significant reform and modernisation of the Irish Prison Service in recent years. The improvements implemented include the construction of a new prison in Cork, which opened in 2016, and the complete refurbishment of all the wings in Mountjoy. The Irish Prison Service's Capital Strategy 2016-2021 outlines plans for the complete replacement of the outdated accommodation in Limerick and Portlaoise prisons as well as improvements across a number of other prisons. On completion of the Strategy, the practice of slopping out will be full eliminated.

In addition to introducing a step down unit for female offenders, the Irish Prison Service are developing plans to address the female accommodation situation within the prison estate. This will be achieved by the modernisation and expansion of facilities in Limerick Prison, which will include the provision of high quality prison accommodation and services for female prisoners with a capacity of approximately fifty individual cells and eight transition units. 2017 also saw continued improvement to work and training facilities and visiting facilities across the Prison Estate.

In addition to the major improvements in infrastructure and the reduction of the numbers in custody in recent years, the Irish Prison Service is continuing its implementation of Government policy in focusing on rehabilitative initiatives. A greater emphasis has been placed on rehabilitative and support services and there are a wide range of rehabilitative programmes provided that include education, vocational training, healthcare, psychiatric, psychological, counselling, welfare and spiritual services. Access to these services is a critical feature for offenders in addressing their offending behaviour.

Greater emphasis is also now placed on pre-release planning with the supports put in place and links made to services in the community for offenders leaving custody greatly improving outcomes. 2017 saw the continued successful implementation of the Community Return Programme. This is an incentivised scheme where carefully selected offenders can be granted structured temporary release in return for supervised community service. It has been in operation since October 2011 and up to the end of 2017, over 2,000 prisoners were released back into the community in a structured manner, which is a compliance rate of 90%.

The Community Support Scheme is a scheme which was set up to assist with reducing recidivism rates by providing additional supports for prisoners serving sentences of between three and twelve months, giving them a more structured form of temporary release. This Scheme has recently been extended to Castlerea prison and now covers all prisons across the Estate. 2017 saw 750 people involved in the Community Return and Community Support Scheme.

### **Garda Transport Data**

129. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of new Garda community relations vans that came into the fleet in each of the years 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018; the number of community relations vans that were withdrawn from the fleet in the same period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21695/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Government's Capital Plan 2016 – 2021 provides €46 million for investment in the Garda fleet, to ensure that An Garda Síochána has a modern, effective and fit-for-purpose fleet and this is in addition to the investment of almost €30 million in the period 2013 to 2015. In total, in the period 2013 to 2017, almost €44 million has been invested in the fleet.

As the Deputy will appreciate, decisions in relation to the provision and allocation of Garda vehicles are a matter for the Garda Commissioner in the light of his identified operational demands and the availability of resources. As Minister, I have no direct role in the matter.

I have been informed by the Garda authorities that, as of 15 May 2018, 14 vehicles are allocated to community relations nationwide. I understand from the Garda authorities that the allocation of Garda vehicles is monitored and reviewed on a continual basis and that vehicles are allocated between districts as required by operational circumstances.

I have further been informed by the Garda authorities that the number of community relations vans (personnel carriers or minibuses) allocated to or withdrawn from the fleet in 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018 are as follows:

Year	Allocated	Withdrawn
2016	3	6
2017	3	5
2018	0	0

I understand from the Garda authorities that it is not intended to purchase additional community relations vans in 2018.

### **Work Permits Applications**

130. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the status of an application for a work permit by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21515/18]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** An application for a General Employment Permit for the person concerned was received on 7 April 2018. The Employment Permits Section of my Department is currently processing standard applications received on 8 March 2018 and this application should be processed within the next 5 weeks.

### **Enterprise Support Services Provision**

131. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the supports which are available for small start-up businesses in terms of financial supports, guidance and other supports; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21583/18]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Department engages with relevant agencies/organisations to offer supports to businesses at all stages of their business cycle. In relation to accessing credit, the banks are, and will continue to be, the first port of call for finance for small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). However, a number of Government initiatives have been introduced in order to ensure that SMEs obtain appropriate finance in order to sustain and grow their businesses. The Credit Guarantee Scheme which was first launched in 2012 has been designed to address three barriers to lending; inadequate collateral, novel business market, sector or technology which is perceived by finance providers as higher risk under current credit risk evaluation practices and/or a need for refinancing caused by the exit of an SMEs lender from the Irish market. More information on

the scheme can be obtained at on the Departments website.

Businesses with up to 10 employees can make an application to Microfinance Ireland (MFI), which offers support in the form of loans of up to €25,000 to start-ups, newly established or growing businesses that do not meet the conventional risk criteria applied by the banks. Further information on Microfinance Ireland is available at [www.microfinanceireland.ie](http://www.microfinanceireland.ie).

The Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) are the ‘first-stop-shop’ for providing advice and guidance, financial assistance and other supports to those wishing to start or grow their own business. In the first instance, they provide a ‘signposting’ service in relation to all relevant state supports available, offer advice and guidance in different areas, e.g. local authority rates, public procurement and other regulations affecting business. They can also offer direct grant aid to microenterprises (with 10 employees or fewer) which is subject to eligibility criteria.

Additionally, there is the Supporting SMEs website which contains over 100 possible supports (financial and non-financial) which may be available to a particular SME. Further information is available at <https://www.supportingsmes.ie/BusinessDetails.aspx>. Further information on possible business supports is available from <https://dbe.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Supports-for-SMEs/Which-support-is-for-you/> which includes a comprehensive spreadsheet mapping of supports. This a good first point of contact in order to establish the potential supports that may be available.

### **Enterprise Ireland Staff**

132. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of the additional 18 staff to deal with Brexit that have been filled by Enterprise Ireland to date; the timeline for recruiting the full number; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21697/18]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Enterprise Ireland is working vigorously to enable companies to consolidate market share within the UK and also to become more resilient by broadening their sales to other international markets.

My Department provided additional resources in 2017 to enable EI to ramp up supports in light of Brexit to drive improvements in:

- productivity,
- competitiveness,
- innovation, and
- management capability and leadership skills.

Enterprise Ireland’s funding for 2017 included an additional €1.7 million to assist in the recruitment of 39 Brexit specific posts. A further €1.3m was provided in budget 2018 to enable EI to recruit approximately 18 additional staff this year.

To date, 5 staff have been recruited by the Agency this year to deal with Brexit and Enterprise Ireland are actively recruiting the remaining posts.

### **Industrial Relations**

133. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if provision for legislative change or other measures necessary will be made to ensure that occupational pension issues can be heard for former employees using the State's industrial relations machinery such as the Labour Court. [21708/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen):** It is important to stress that the industrial relations system in Ireland is voluntary in nature as regards access to the Workplace Relations Commission and the Labour Court. Any change to that principle would alter fundamentally the conduct of industrial relations that has served us very well.

The Industrial Relations (Amendment) Act 2015 introduced a provision to provide access to the industrial relations bodies in respect of former employees on an individual basis. This was facilitated by an amendment to Section 23 of the Industrial Relations Act 1990 which extended the scope of the definition of "worker" to include workers who have ceased employment.

The question of providing access to the State's industrial relations bodies by groups of pensioners was also considered in the context of the Industrial Relations (Amendment) Act 2015. However, it was considered that it was more appropriate that collective concerns relating to pensions should more appropriately be addressed under pensions legislation.

It is the case that active members of pension schemes can and do regularly engage with employers in an attempt to reach an agreed position as regards changes in pension schemes. This may come about as a result of a crisis in the scheme or otherwise. The outcome of that engagement can only be a collective agreement which cannot, in and of itself, alter the pension schemes concerned. Proposed changes to schemes are given effect via the mechanisms set out in pension trust deeds and rules of schemes and are at the discretion of the parties designated in the rules/deeds of schemes. It is considered that it is within this framework that a collective approach would be most effective.

In terms of changes to pension schemes generally, the Trustees of a particular pension scheme are required by law to act in the best interests of all the members, be they active, deferred or pensioner members.

Responsibility for pensions legislation rests with my colleague, Regina Doherty TD, Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and I understand that Section 50 of the Pensions Act 1990 was revised in 2015 to provide for the recognition by trustees and the Pensions Authority of groups representing the interests of retired and deferred scheme members of a particular pension scheme.

### **Medical Card Reviews**

134. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health when a medical card review will be finalised in respect of a person (details supplied) that has provided documentary evidence from the Revenue Commissioners that they are tax compliant and correspondence from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection confirming their low income; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21499/18]

**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 Administration**

135. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for surgery for a person (details supplied) will be expedited. [21503/18]

**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 Services**

136. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 322 of 23 January 2018, when Louth County Hospital will begin seeing patients over five years of age at the minor injuries unit; if additional staff have been recruited to facilitate same; if there will be appropriate advertising to notify persons of such changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21533/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** RCSI Hospitals had originally estimated that by Q1 2018 paediatric patients over the age of five would be treated in Louth County Hospital's minor injury unit, if they met the criteria of a minor injury. However, the RCSI has advised that due to unanticipated resignations, it has delayed the agreed start time. The RCSI has further advised that while the Louth Hospitals continue to endeavour to recruit the compliment of staff that is required to establish a safe level of service, they are not in a position to provide an updated time frame at this time.

In relation to the specific queries raised by the Deputy, as these are service matters, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly as soon as possible.

### **Tobacco Control Measures**

137. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the research being conducted to test the effectiveness of e-cigarettes in helping smokers quit smoking; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21567/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Smoking is the greatest single cause of preventable illness and premature death in Ireland, killing almost 6,000 people a year.

The primary objectives set out in the *Tobacco Free Ireland* (2013) policy document are to denormalise smoking and to protect children from the dangers of tobacco consumption. *Tobacco Free Ireland* sets a target for Ireland to be tobacco free (i.e. with a prevalence rate of less than 5%) by 2025.

*Tobacco Free Ireland* contains a number of recommendations to assist smokers in quitting tobacco use. One of those recommendations is to examine the evidence regarding the outcomes of the use of Nicotine Replacement Therapy ('NRT') and other approaches.

My Department requested HIQA to undertake a Health Technology Assessment ('HTA') of the clinical and cost effectiveness of pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical smoking cessation products and services. The HTA was published in 2017 and found that all the pharmacological interventions were effective compared to no treatment and that a prescription only drug called varenicline was the most effective drug on its own. However, the HTA also found that using a combination of varenicline and NRT was the most effective pharmacological intervention and that people using this combination were over three and a half times more likely to quit than those who were in a control group and did not receive this treatment.

Group behavioural therapy, individual counselling, intensive advice and telephone support were all found to be effective behavioural interventions with group therapy found to be the most effective of these interventions. The addition of a behavioural intervention to a pharmacological intervention improved the effectiveness of the intervention.

The HTA recommended that smoking cessation services should seek to increase the uptake of varenicline, either alone or in combination with NRT, for smokers who want to use a pharmacological support.

In relation to e-cigarettes and vaping, although the HTA found that results for e-cigarettes are promising, there is currently a lack of evidence to recommend their use as a smoking cessation aid and at present no e-cigarette product is licensed as a medicinal product in Ireland. The safety of e-cigarettes is an evolving area of research; while potentially safer than smoking, evidence on its long-term safety has yet to be established. In the absence of additional evidence confirming the effectiveness of e-cigarettes, the HTA recommended that the HSE smoking cessation services should seek to increase the uptake of combination NRT treatment among those for whom varenicline is contraindicated, not tolerated or not preferred.

The results of the HTA are informing the development by the HSE, in conjunction with the National Clinical Effectiveness Committee, of national clinical guidelines.

Current evidence-based means of quitting include behavioural support and pharmacotherapies. The HSE provides and promotes these safe and evidence-based services, supports and aids to help people to quit. The HSE recommends that those wishing to give up smoking uses its cessation services as the first port of call.

My Department will continue to monitor the emerging research on all products, so as to inform decisions around any future additional regulation in this area.

### **Medicinal Products Licensing**

138. **Deputy Seán Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the reason patients with multiple sclerosis have to wait an average of 348 days for a treatment drug to be approved for public funding and in some cases even longer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21569/18]

**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.

Under the 2013 Act, if a company would like a medicine to be reimbursed by the HSE in the community drug schemes, it must submit an application to the HSE to have the medicine added to the Reimbursement List.

As outlined in the 2016 Framework Agreement with industry, 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 add the medicine to the reimbursement list, agree to reimburse it as a hospital medicine or refuse to reimburse it.

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 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 may be ongoing multi-million euro investments. Price discussions 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 in place and must also recognise fundamental pricing/funding issues, in the context of finite Exchequer resources.

### Hospital Services

139. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding blood tests in Drogheda and Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital; if they have been outsourced; if this will lead to delays in obtaining results; if results will all be paper based; and his views on whether this will lead to a diminution in patient safety [21570/18]

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

### Health Services Expenditure

140. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the cost of running the health service in each of the years 2011 to 2017 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21580/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The budget for the health service for the years 2011 - 2017 is set out in the following table:

Year	Capital	Current	Health Total
	€m	€m	€m
2011	347	12,632	12,979
2012	350	12,568	12,918
2013	347	12,459	12,806

Year	Capital	Current	Health Total
2014	382	12,695	13,077
2015	382	13,341	13,723
2016	414	13,695	14,109
2017	454	14,347	14,801

As the Deputy will appreciate, comparing health expenditure across countries is not a clear cut process, and there are a variety of ways of measuring health spend. In addition, in the case of Ireland, the health budget includes significant expenditure on personal social services, such as long term care for older people and people with disabilities, which are not a feature of other health systems such as the NHS.

It is, however clear to us all that we will need to make significant and sustainable investments and reforms across the health service if we are to meet the impending challenges of a growing and aging population.

The Sláintecare report provides for this. We want a health service that provides better and timelier access to health service, has better patient outcomes and also one that deliver value for money. To do this, there is a need for a fundamental change in how and where we deliver services.

### Departmental Expenditure

141. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the cost of operating his Department in each of the years 2011 to 2017, excluding the HSE budget; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21581/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The following table sets out the costs for operating the Department of Health for the years 2011 to 2017:

Year	Operational Costs €m
2011	26.531
2012	27.265
2013	25.926
2014	25.345
2015	26.215
2016	27.314
2017	30.559

### Commencement of Legislation

142. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health when all sections of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 will be enacted; the timeframe for full enactment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21596/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the Deputy may be aware, the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 has 12 Parts, containing a total of 180 sections. The commencement of the Act is the responsibility of a number of Departments including the Department of Justice and Equality, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection

16 May 2018

and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. As the responsibility of the Department of Health relates solely to the commencement of Parts 2 and 3 of the Act, I can only respond in respect of those two Parts.

A number of technical drafting issues have come to light in relation to Parts 2 and 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 as these discussions are ongoing, I do not wish to pre-empt the outcome by citing specific details. I would be happy to arrange a briefing for the Deputy on the substantive issues in due course.

### **Departmental Communications**

143. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if his attention was drawn to memos (details supplied) in 2016 or 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21597/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** These memos were not brought to my attention until they were released last week.

### **Hospital Appointments Administration**

144. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person (details supplied) will be scheduled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21598/18]

**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.

### **Departmental Communications**

145. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if memos (details supplied) were brought to the attention of his predecessor; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21599/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** These memos were not brought to the attention of my predecessor until their release last week.

## **Hospital Appointments Administration**

146. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person (details supplied) will be scheduled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21602/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

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

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

## **Disability Support Services Provision**

147. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the status of a residential placement for a person (details supplied); when a place will be offered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21608/18]

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

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

## **Disabilities Data**

148. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons with disabilities in Cork city and county on a waiting list with a HSE service provider (details supplied) for a residential placement; the timeframe these persons have been waiting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21609/18]

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

people with disabilities.

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

### **Disabilities Data**

149. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons with disabilities in Cork city and county on a waiting list with a HSE service provider (details supplied) for a residential placement; the timeframe these persons have been waiting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21610/18]

**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.

### **Departmental Communications**

150. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a copy of circular 1/91 issued by his Department (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21611/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Circular 1/1991 was issued to explain the changes in health services eligibility and in arrangements to public hospital services which were announced in the Programme for Economic & Social Progress which was published in January 1991. These changes, which were underpinned by the Health (Amendment) Act 1991, took effect from 1 June 1991. A copy of the requested Circular has been e-mailed directly to the Deputy.

### **Medicinal Products Reimbursement**

151. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if recommendations have been made for a drug (details supplied) by the HSE drugs group following the seeking of additional information in January 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21612/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines under the community drug schemes, under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. In reaching a decision, the HSE examines all the evidence which may be relevant in its view for the decision and will consider such expert opinions and recommendations as it may have sought.

The Rare Diseases Medicinal Products Technology Review Committee is engaged with prescribers and the patient representative group to establish clear reimbursement guidelines for

sapropterin. These would be expected to target sapropterin for patient cohorts for which it may be a cost-effective intervention.

The reimbursement guidelines are expected to include a requirement for response testing, to detail the criteria to identify patient cohorts for whom reimbursement of sapropterin would be a cost-effective use of resources and to include appropriate monitoring and control mechanisms. These engagements are ongoing.

The HSE Drugs Group will review the output of such engagements at the earliest opportunity to examine whether the above aims were achieved and will consider a reimbursement recommendation at that time.

### **HSE Data**

152. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health the number of children aged one or under that are buried at the HSE owned cemetery at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21614/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I have no information on the matter raised by the Deputy. This is a child welfare issue and is therefore a matter for my colleague the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs.

### **Child Care Services Data**

153. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health the number of children aged one or under that died in periods at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21615/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I have no information on the matter raised by the Deputy. This is a child welfare issue and is therefore a matter for my colleague the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs.

### **HSE Data**

154. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the HSE figure which shows that there has been an increase of 100,000 personal assistant hours in 2017; if the 100,000 hours allocated are to persons already in the system or new individuals; the source from which the funding increase has been provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21635/18]

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

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

## **Disability Services Provision**

155. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21639/18]

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

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

## **Disabilities Assessments**

156. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to engage with parents, schools, the representative bodies of psychologists, occupational therapists and speech and language therapists in relation to concerns regarding the new model for assessment of need for children with special needs [21651/18]

**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.

## **Home Care Packages Data**

157. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in receipt of home support services at 30 April 2018; the number that were approved and waiting for home support services for each CHO area at 30 April 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21690/18]

**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.

## **Appointments to State Boards**

158. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the process involved and the associated timeframe to appoint a board for the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21692/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** On 15 May 2018, Government approved legislation for an independent Board for the HSE and I will now be publishing the General Scheme of the Bill. An independent Board for the HSE was recommended by the Oireachtas Committee on the Future of Healthcare (Sláintecare Report) and the necessary legislation is on the priority list for publication in the Government's Legislation Programme for this session. The Board will be a non-executive Board, with the skills and competencies for objective scrutiny of the HSE and to challenge when necessary. Board members can be appointed by the Minister when the legislation is in place and I look forward to working with Deputies and Senators with a view to getting the legislation through the Houses of the Oireachtas this year.

### **National Cervical Screening Programme**

159. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health when he or his predecessor's attention was drawn to the problems with CervicalCheck false negative results; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21700/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Documentation from 2016 that contained references to the cervical cancer clinical audit, and the outcomes therefrom, was not brought to my attention, or that of my predecessor, until its release last week.

I received a briefing note in relation to a legal case which had been taken against MedLab/Clinical Pathology Laboratories Ltd, a company providing cytopathology for CervicalCheck, and the HSE on 16 April 2018. I have published that briefing note and set out the information available to me on the record of the Dáil.

### **Departmental Communications**

160. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health if he or one of his predecessors were informed of the media strategy for reporting on the number of false negative cervical checks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21701/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Documentation from 2016 that contained references to media matters was not brought to my attention, or that of my predecessor, until its release last week.

### **National Cervical Screening Programme**

161. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health if his attention was drawn to the prospect of legal action from laboratories that are involved in CervicalCheck; when his attention was drawn to same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21702/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Documentation from 2016 that contained information in relation to the possibility of legal action by laboratories was not brought to my attention until its release last week.

### **National Cervical Screening Programme Data**

162. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health if his attention was drawn to the different levels of detection rates in the three different laboratories performing Cervical-

Check; if an investigation was done into possible causes for the differences; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21703/18]

163. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health the level of detection rates for cervical checks in the different laboratories performing same in each of the years 2008 to 2017 inclusive. [21704/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 162 and 163 together.

These questions relate to matters which are now the subject of a Scoping Inquiry that I established on 8 May 2018.

The Terms of Reference of the Scoping Inquiry, which is being led by Dr Gabriel Scally, are very comprehensive and include the following in relation to laboratories contracted by CervicalCheck:

- examine the tendering, contracting, operation, conflict of interest arrangements, performance information and performance management, accreditation and quality assurance of contracted cytology laboratory services by CervicalCheck from initiation of the programme.

I believe it appropriate that an expert clinical inquiry examines these matters.

#### **National Cervical Screening Programme Data**

164. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of clinicians that were contacted by CervicalCheck on foot of the smear test review; and if all of these clinicians have made contact with all their patients that are covered by the audit [21706/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I am advised by the HSE that approximately 30 clinicians were contacted by CervicalCheck on foot of the smear test review.

A total 205 of the 209 women, or their next-of-kin, where the audit showed their test could have provided a different result, have been contacted and efforts are continuing to contact the remaining women.

#### **National Cervical Screening Programme Data**

165. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the status of the cases of cervical cancer that were not audited; the number of these cases in which the woman had had a smear test; the number of persons that have not been contacted; the reason for same; if all of the women have been contacted; and his views on their situation [21707/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The HSE has advised that they will conclude the matching process with the National Cancer Registry in the next week in relation to women who were not part of the original CervicalCheck audit. The Deputy will appreciate that I am not in a position to provide any further information in relation to the number of women involved, until such time as this data matching process is completed and fully validated.

The Deputy will be aware that an International Clinical Expert Review Panel, led by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists with expert input from the British Association of Colposcopists & Cervical Pathologists, is being established. This independent review

panel will consider all cases of invasive cervical cancer in Ireland since the inception of the CervicalCheck screening programme and will identify those cases who were screened by the programme. The process will examine the screening history of women who were screened by CervicalCheck and will identify those who had a previous smear(s) prior to their diagnosis. For these women the expert panel will review their screening, cytological and clinical histories and undertake a re-examination of their cytology tests. Where the review opinion of the cytology result(s) differs to the original result provided by CervicalCheck, the review panel will endeavour to determine any failures to prevent cancer or to intervene at an earlier stage and will prepare individual reports for those affected, establishing the facts and the implications where these have been determined.

I should also mention that a Working Group, including representatives from the Department and the HSE, will be established to work with the review panel in order to ensure that any issues are resolved and progressed.

Finally, I can assure the Deputy that the additional women who have cervical cancer and also had cytology with the CervicalCheck programme will be prioritised.

### **Departmental Communications**

166. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if memos (details supplied) were discussed at central management meetings within his Department at which he and the Secretary General of his Department were in attendance in each of the years 2015 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21713/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The records available to me indicate that these matters were not discussed at any Management Board meeting which I or my predecessor attended.

### **Departmental Communications**

167. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the action the Chief Medical Officer took when his attention was drawn to memos (details supplied); if advice and or direction was issued regarding the contents of the documents; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21714/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** This question relates to matters which are now the subject of a Scoping Inquiry. I announced the terms of reference of this Inquiry following agreement by Government on 08 May 2018. The Inquiry, led by Dr Gabriel Scally, will examine the facts, including details of the non-disclosure to patients relating to CervicalCheck clinical audits and the management and level of knowledge of various parties including, the HSE and the Department of Health. Dr Scally will report to the Minister by the end of next month setting out his findings. The terms of reference for the Scoping Inquiry are published on my Department's website.

### **Departmental Correspondence**

168. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if his Department notified or sent documents (details supplied) to the State Claims Agency, the Chief State Solicitor or the Office of the Attorney General since 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[21715/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The documents concerned were not forwarded to the State Claims Agency, the Chief State Solicitor or the Attorney General.

The documents provided the Department with an understanding that a retrospective clinical audit was being undertaken for quality assurance and learning purposes and CervicalCheck had a clear objective to provide results to consultants in order to allow for direct communication with the women concerned. The Department was assured as to the merit of the clinical audit and the communication of the results to the women concerned.

In the circumstances, the question of sharing the documents with the State Claims Agency, the Chief State Solicitor or the Attorney General did not arise.

### **HSE Staff Recruitment**

169. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the process involved in the appointment of a new director general for the HSE; the length of time the process will take; the arrangements that will be put in place following the retirement of the former director general and prior to the appointment of a new director general; the reason the position is only being advertised now; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21717/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Preparations are advancing regarding the process for the appointment of a new Director General for the HSE. This will be done in accordance with the provisions of the governing legislation which is Section 16E of the Health Act 2004 as amended by the Health Service (Governance) Act, 2013. This requires that the recruitment process will be undertaken in line with the Public Service Management (Recruitment and Appointments) Act 2004. The recruitment will be carried out by the Public Appointments Service and will include an international executive search. My Department is engaging with the Public Appointments Service to progress this as a priority.

The post will be advertised shortly.

In the meanwhile, I have appointed Mr John Connaghan to carry out the role of Director General of the HSE pending the completion of the recruitment process

### **Tobacco Control Measures**

170. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the HSE tobacco-free campus “No Smoking” signage includes e-cigarettes (details supplied); his views on whether this might cause confusion amongst smokers seeking to cease; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21718/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As ‘Tobacco Free Campus’ is a Health Service Executive (HSE) initiative I have asked the HSE to reply directly to the Deputy on this question. If you have not received a reply within fifteen working days please contact my Private Office and it will follow up on the matter.

### **Mental Health Services Provision**

171. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Health the mental health services initiatives specifically tailored towards men and women, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21719/18]

**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.

### **Commonage Framework Plans**

172. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of fully completed commonage management plans received by his Department; the number outstanding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21528/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The requirement to prepare a Commonage Management Plan (CMP) is and has always been an essential component of the GLAS scheme. A complete CMP is required for each commonage over 10 hectares. The facility to submit CMP's has been available since October of last year and completed CMPs continue to be submitted on an ongoing basis. As of May 14 827 CMP's have been submitted leaving 3,374 remaining.

The Department has regularly highlighted the fact that GLAS participants must ensure compliance with the Scheme requirements. The requirement is to submit a complete CMP. Failure to submit will prevent further payments, including balancing payments. The Department will continue to bring this requirement to the attention of GLAS participants.

### **Aquaculture Regulation**

173. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the efforts he has made to resolve the issue of the proliferation of unregulated and unlicensed oyster farms along the Inishowen shore of Lough Foyle, County Donegal; when the Loughs Agency will be given the authority to regulate and licence these operations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21585/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** As the Deputy is aware, the management of aquaculture and associated foreshore licensing functions in Lough Foyle gives rise to legal and jurisdictional complexities.

Applications for Aquaculture licences are considered by my Department under the provisions of the 1997 Fisheries (Amendment) Act, the 1933 Foreshore Act, and applicable EU Legislation. However, in the case of Lough Foyle, Section 2 of the 1997 Fisheries (Amendment) Act disappplies the Act to the Moville Area, as it is defined in the Foyle Fisheries Act, 1952.

The Good Friday Agreement provided for the establishment of the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission (FCILC). This body is one of the six North South Implementation Bodies created under the Agreement. The Loughs Agency, as part of the FCILC, has been given responsibility for fisheries related matters in respect of both Lough Foyle and Carlingford Lough and the legislation envisages that the Agency will enter into a management agreement with the relevant authorities in both jurisdictions with a view to assuming responsibility for aquaculture licensing within the loughs. Discussions in respect of the management agreement are ongoing.

Negotiations regarding the jurisdiction of the Lough Foyle area are, in the first instance, a matter for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

My Department organises and participates in an inter-departmental working group which is pursuing a way forward in terms of the future management of aquaculture and associated foreshore activities on Lough Foyle, in parallel with a workable resolution of the complex jurisdictional issues involved.

In view of the multi dimensional and cross jurisdictional nature of the issues involved it would not be appropriate for me to comment further at this time.

### **Young Farmers Scheme Eligibility**

174. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the classification of land (details supplied); if it is considered clean land; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21653/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Successful applicants under the National Reserve priority categories of ‘young farmer’ and ‘new entrant to farming’ are eligible for an allocation of entitlements on eligible land for which they hold no entitlements and/or a top-up to the value of existing entitlements held by them where such entitlements have a value below the National Reserve National Average. The removal of existing entitlements from land for the purpose of creating ‘clean land’ upon which a National Reserve allocation can be made is not permitted.

Land declared in support of an application for an allocation of payment entitlements under the National Reserve is subject to administrative and on-farm checks as required to determine eligibility.

### **Young Farmers Scheme Eligibility**

175. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if clean land (details supplied) is eligible to receive top-up entitlements for the young farmers allocation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21654/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Successful applicants under the National Reserve priority categories of ‘young farmer’ and ‘new entrant to farming’ are eligible for an allocation of entitlements on eligible land for which they hold no entitlements and/or a top-up to the value of existing entitlements held by them where such entitlements have a value below the National Reserve National Average. The removal of existing entitlements from land for the purpose of creating ‘clean land’ upon which a National Reserve allocation can be made is not permitted.

Land declared in support of an application for an allocation of payment entitlements under the National Reserve is subject to administrative and on-farm checks as required to determine eligibility.

### **Basic Payment Scheme Eligibility**

176. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if there

is a derogation for fencing for land (details supplied) as in respect of cross-compliance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21655/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Terms and Conditions of the Basic Payments Scheme outline the requirements regarding the fencing of land. The Terms and Conditions state that there must be a defined external boundary, and that the boundary must be sufficient to control the farmers' and neighbouring animals.

The only exemption to the requirement for stock-proof fencing is outlined in the Department's publication "A Guide to Land Eligibility Direct Payment Schemes 2015", this publication was sent to all farmers in 2015. On the matter of fencing it states "An exemption to this rule is that the need for stock proof fencing is not required for exclusively owned hill lands, provided the lands continue to be farmed in the traditional manner by hill farmers in compliance with the requirements of the EU regulations". The land must be actively farmed and farmed in the traditional manner, this traditional farming refers to farmers having the hill land and the appurtenant low land, so typically the farmer would graze the hills in summer and have the appurtenant low land for the winter period.

In cases where the land has been redistributed and therefore is no longer farmed in the traditional manner there may be issues regarding fencing requirements. The farmer can apply to the Local Authority to fence the lands, this decision is made in conjunction with the NPWS, where required.

### **Environmental Policy**

177. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to introduce a national ban on plastic straws on environmental grounds. [21664/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** In January, the European Commission published the European Strategy for Plastics in the Circular Economy. The strategy focuses on plastic production and use. It sets a goal of ensuring all plastic packaging will be recyclable by 2030.

Recently, I wrote to the European Commissioner with responsibility for the environment to welcome the plastics strategy. I assured him Ireland fully embraced the ambitions of the new strategy. I asked the Commission to focus, in particular, on the most difficult non-recyclable plastics such as soft wrapping, film and single use items such as plastic straws. I am determined to make sure these products, if they come onto the market here or elsewhere in Europe, will be recyclable or compostable and that they will not go into landfill sites.

The EU Commission will be proposing EU-wide action to tackle such items this month. I believe that working proactively with our European colleagues will achieve a greater environmental benefit. If the actions proposed at EU level require national legislation, I will act thereon as soon as possible.

### **Compulsory Purchase Orders**

178. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the compulsory purchase order methodology which will be applied to house and apartment owners of those that will be impacted by the MetroLink project; and if he will make a statement on the

matter. [21543/18]

179. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if comparable alternative accommodation will be offered to homeowners and tenants of those that receive compulsory purchase orders due to the MetroLink project. [21544/18]

180. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if compensation in addition to market value will be offered to those that receive compulsory purchase orders due to the MetroLink project. [21545/18]

181. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the engagement, advice and support provided and offered to those whose homes fall under compulsory purchase orders due to the MetroLink project. [21546/18]

182. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the criteria for issuing compulsory purchase orders relevant to infrastructure or transport projects. [21547/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 178 to 182, inclusive, together.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) including the development of a metro scheme (MetroLink), and Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) is the agency tasked with delivery of the MetroLink project.

The recently published Project Ireland 2040 proposes to take forward a MetroLink scheme to run from Swords, via Dublin Airport to Dublin's south city centre (operating in tunnel under the city centre) and onwards to Sandyford using the existing Luas Green Line to ensure that growth along this corridor can be accommodated.

The details of the MetroLink scheme (Swords to Sandyford) were the subject of a non-statutory public consultation process over the last month. It is planned to commence construction of the scheme in 2021 with a view to its completion by 2027.

A Railway Order is required to construct and operate the scheme and for the necessary compulsory purchase order arrangements. Accordingly, an application for a Railway Order will be submitted in 2019 when a detailed Business Case for the scheme has been approved that seeks power to construct and operate the scheme and also to ensure that the necessary compulsory purchase order arrangements are given effect to secure the scheme.

In relation to the detail of the specific queries and given the role of both the NTA and TII, I have forwarded the Deputy's questions to both organisations for direct reply. Please inform my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

### **Departmental Bodies Establishment**

183. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the proposal to establish a working group arising from recommendations in the national policy statement on airport charges regulation; if the working group has been established; if so, the membership of the group; the number of meetings held to date; the activities of the

working group; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21565/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As outlined in my Department's National Policy Statement on Airport Charges, my Department committed to establish a working group of key stakeholders to examine and report on options to allow the regulated entity and its airline customers to reach price agreements amongst themselves, subject to regulatory oversight.

In December, my Department issued a discussion paper to key stakeholders seeking their views on this matter. The responses to that paper have been received. Arrangements are currently being made to follow this consultation phase with formal engagement with the relevant parties in the coming few weeks.

### **Integrated Ticketing**

184. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the use of the Leap card in County Donegal will be rolled out (details supplied); his views on whether it is fair that as a result of the reliance on Bus Éireann expressway routes that service users in the county do not have access to the same discount options as those that use the Leap card in cities and are therefore forced to pay full price for each trip; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21586/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the development and implementation of public transport including ticketing technology.

Therefore, I have forwarded your query to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

### **Parking Provision**

185. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a parking infrastructure increase is planned for Portarlinton train station to match the increase in service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21589/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I wish to advise the Deputy that the National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure and services in the Greater Dublin Area and undertakes a support role for the relevant local authorities, on a non statutory basis, in the Regional cities of Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford.

Issues relating to the provision of car parking spaces at train stations on the heavy rail network outside of these cities, such as Portarlinton, are an operational matter for Iarnród Éireann which receives Exchequer funding for such works via the NTA.

Noting the role of Iarnród Eireann and NTA in the matter of park and ride facilities, I have referred your question to both bodies to provide information on the issue raised. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

186. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of taxi contracts awarded by the HSE that include accessibility in their selection criteria in the tender process (details supplied); if in the tender process the HSE places extra weighting to taxi operators with accessible vehicles when awarding contracts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21636/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Details in relation to taxi contracts awarded by the HSE are a matter for that body which operates under the aegis of my colleague, the Minister for Health.

The Sectoral Plan, to which the Deputy refers, was published in 2013, and the Office of Government Procurement (OGP) commenced operations the following year. The OGP, together with four key sectors (Health, Defence, Education and Local Government), assumed responsibility for sourcing all goods and services on behalf of the Public Service. In addition, the OGP also has responsibility for procurement policy and procedures. My Department has no role in the tendering process for transport services.

As the Deputy may be aware, the Programme for Government contains a commitment to introduce a provision whereby taxi companies who wish to bid for State procurement contracts must ensure that a minimum of 10% of their fleet is wheelchair accessible. The Office of Government Procurement (OGP) is the lead agency in respect of this commitment.

### **Public Transport Fares**

187. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to review Bus Éireann fare costs in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21698/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

### **Youth Work Projects Funding**

188. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the allocation of capital expenditure for youth work services in each of the years 2014 to 2018 in tabular form. [21548/18]

189. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the funds disbursed to and spent by youth work services under capital expenditure funding schemes in each of the years 2014 to 2017, and to date 2018, in tabular form. [21549/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 188 and 189 together.

In recent years, capital funding has been made available to my Department to support youth projects in local communities. The funding provided for the purchase of equipment and supported small scale projects, including refurbishments, health and safety fit-outs and accessibility improvements in local voluntary youth services. The capital allocations to my Department between 2014 and 2018 were as follows:

Year	Capital allocation
2014	€500,000
2015	€500,000
2016	€2,600,000
2017	€2,600,000
2018	€2,600,000

In 2014 a capital allocation of €500,000 was made available to fund small equipment and capital projects in the youth services. Fifty youth projects received grants under the scheme.

In 2015 a capital allocation of €500,000 was made available to fund small capital projects in youth services. Sixteen youth projects across the country received grants under the scheme.

An amount of €2.6m in 2016 was allocated to the Department for a capital funding scheme for youth projects and services that are funded by the Department under the youth funding schemes. Under the Youth Capital Funding Scheme 2016/2017, eighty six youth projects across the country were provided capital funding.

During 2017, I was in a position to approve the overall allocation of €6.35m under the Local Youth Club Equipment Scheme in 2017. This allocation was comprised of the €2.6m youth capital allocation in 2017, unspent and returned monies under the Youth Capital Funding Scheme 2016 / 2017 and other funding which became available to my Department during 2017.

The primary focus of this scheme was to assist volunteer led clubs and groups that work with young people in communities throughout the country. The scheme allowed for the purchase of equipment for sport, arts, adventure and other much needed items.

Earlier this month, I was pleased to launch the Youth Capital Funding Scheme 2018. Under this scheme, €2m is being made available for targeted staff-led youth projects and services across the country to fund small capital projects. The Scheme is to support purchase of equipment and to fund small scale projects including the upgrade of bathrooms and kitchens in youth services.

In addition, over 2017 and 2018 capital funding has been made available to new youth projects and services, established in line with the recommendations of the Value for Money and Policy Review of Youth Funding Schemes.

### **Youth Work Projects Administration**

190. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the way in which the policy and priorities for capital expenditure for youth work services each year is determined; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21550/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** My Department has in place a Youth Capital Working Group. The Group comprises youth officers representing the sixteen Education and Training Boards and officials from my Department. This Group was responsible for the design of the Local Youth Club Equipment Scheme in 2017 and the Youth Capital Funding Scheme 2018, which was formally launched earlier this month. It is my intention that the Group will make recommendations on future capital schemes, should monies be made available.

## Youth Services Funding

191. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 270 to 272, inclusive, of 31 May 2017, the allocation of expenditure to the various youth work programmes and schemes in 2018 in tabular form. [21551/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Budget 2018 provided an additional €1.5m in current funding to my Department to support the provision of these youth services. This will bring total current youth funding in 2018 to €58.9m. This additional funding has been used for programmes that target disadvantaged young people. The following table shows the 2018 allocations, broken down by funding line:

Fund	2018
Special Projects for Youth	€14,714,217
Young People's Facilities and Services Fund (Round 1)	€5,735,599
Young People's Facilities and Services Fund (Round 2)	€13,515,056
Local Drugs Task Force Projects	€1,218,639
Revised Youth Funding Scheme	€2,661,826
Targeted funds total	€37,845,337
Youth Information Centres	€1,377,060
Youth Service Grant Scheme	€10,658,170
Local Youth Club Grant Scheme	€2,313,924
Youth Officer Allocation and Technical Assistance	€3,620,092
LGBTI+ Youth Strategy	€400,000
Other National Youth Organisations and Youth Initiatives	€1,742,210
DCYA Policy and Support Programmes	€513,207
New Initiatives and other funding streams within Department	€425,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>€58,895,000</b>

## Family Resource Centres

192. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the reason Dublin 12 was overlooked for the provision of a family resource centre (details supplied). [21566/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Tusla, the Child and Family Agency is responsible for the administration of the Family Resource Centre Programme.

Family Resource Centres are independent voluntary organisations that deliver universal services to families in local communities, based on a life-cycle approach. The centres seek to combat disadvantage and to provide a wide range of family supports.

In Budget 2018, I secured an additional €3.0m for Tusla to support the Family Resource Centre Programme. The additional funding provided is being used to support existing Family Resource Centres, and also provides for expansion of the Programme with the inclusion of 11 new centres, which means that 120 centres will be operational by the end of 2018.

A high volume of applications were submitted to Tusla, who carried out an assessment process. One of these was from an organisation in the Dublin 12 area. Tusla was faced with a dif-

difficult decision making process in selecting eleven new centres for inclusion in the programme, having regard to its selection criteria. The assessment included consultation with Tusla staff in operational and regional roles, and with Children and Young People's Services Committees around the country.

Tusla has advised me that the quality of applications received was of a very high standard. The methodology and criteria considered in selecting the locations of the 11 new family resource centres included the size and make-up of the geographical area; the social and economic conditions of the specified area; and the overall population breakdown of the area that would be serviced by the centre. The criteria also considered the structure of the organisation(s) applying to the Programme; their objectives, targets, and current relationships with other organisations; and the inclusion of available research, community projects, and needs assessments with the application.

Tusla is acutely aware of the level of need in certain areas, and is actively working to improve outcomes for children and young people. Through its commissioning approach, Tusla plans to deliver, and is already delivering, services in an efficient, equitable and sustainable manner.

It is important that the needs of children and families are met in the best way possible, particularly in areas of disadvantage. I will continue to support the work of Family Resource Centres and family support services throughout the country.

### **Child and Family Agency Funding**

193. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she is satisfied that Tusla is adequately resourced to deal with its workload in view of the recent introduction of mandatory reporting; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21591/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I was pleased to secure an additional €40.6 million for Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, in 2018. This is the third year in succession that Tusla has received a significant increase in its funding, which now amounts to over €753m.

I strongly support the work of Tusla, and I am committed to supporting the Agency in meeting the needs of all children and families.

The extra resources secured for Tusla in 2018 will assist in meeting key priorities. The additional investment will allow Tusla to recruit a range of additional staff to respond to areas of identified risk, and to meet increased demand for services, including an anticipated increase in referrals following the introduction of mandatory reporting.

This increase in funding is also enabling the further management of unallocated cases. In addition, Tusla is in the process of recruiting more administrative staff to support social workers in their child protection duties.

In 2018, funding is also being used to establish a single national out-of-hours social work service, building on significant progress made in recent years in strengthening this service. The extra resources will also support enhanced collaboration with An Garda Síochána, additional on-call social work capacity and a new out-of-hours support service for foster carers.

I have requested Tusla to develop a robust workforce plan which addresses succession planning, retention, career pathways, training and development, future workforce needs, priority

gaps and a strategy for tackling the priority gaps. The workforce plan will be a key part of dealing with a rise in referrals due to mandatory reporting, and in helping to reduce unallocated cases.

I believe that the level of Exchequer funding of over €753m in 2018 provides Tusla with resources to significantly increase its capacity to respond to areas of identified risk and anticipated demand.

The introduction of mandated reporting will no doubt bring challenges, but the resources to help Tusla deal with these challenges are in place. Tusla can, I believe, progress a number of key service developments which will ensure better outcomes for vulnerable children, and families, who need our services and support.

### **Affordable Childcare Scheme Implementation**

194. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of the implementation of the affordable childcare scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21592/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I thank the Deputy. I would be delighted to update her on positive progress my department is making in developing the new Affordable Childcare Scheme.

Officials from my Department, along with colleagues in Pobal, have been working hard to develop the legal, technical and administrative infrastructure for the new Affordable Childcare Scheme. This scheme will provide financial support for parents, establish a sustainable platform for investment in the childcare sector for decades to come and- crucially- allow us to continue to invest in giving our children the best start in life.

As you know, the Childcare Support Bill passed all stages in the Dáil in the first quarter of this year. I was delighted with the positive, cross party support it received and want to thank everyone for their valuable input. The Bill has now completed Committee Stage in the Seanad and will commence Report Stage this Thursday (17/05) so we are hopeful that this stage will be completed over the coming weeks.

Intensive work is also ongoing on the drafting of supporting regulations for the scheme and on regulations to provide, for the first time, for the registration of school-age childcare providers. The latter regulations will ensure that all school-age childcare services are registered with Tusla prior to the introduction of the Affordable Childcare Scheme and can participate in the scheme from the outset.

The IT infrastructure that supports the scheme is making good progress. In January I published a Request for Tenders for the development of a new IT system and an evaluation of tenders received is currently coming to a conclusion. As stated before, the introduction of the scheme is dependent on this new IT system. As such, as soon as a contract is awarded to a successful bidder and a timeframe agreed for the completion of the system, I hope to be in a position to confirm and communicate an official launch date for the Affordable Childcare Scheme.

Work is also progressing well on the administrative and communication elements of the scheme. Specialist expertise has been procured to support the detailed development of a robust governance framework for the scheme. A high-level Communications and Engagement Strategy was published in February and a training needs analysis is underway at present. Both of these provide the starting point for significant work in preparing timely and user-friendly

information, resources and supports for parents, providers and other stakeholders.

In tandem with the development of these resources, I am also committed to ongoing consultation and engagement with all stakeholders in the run-up to the introduction of the scheme.

The Affordable Childcare Scheme is ambitious in scale and complex in its design but I am delighted that we are achieving our milestones in its development and confident of the lasting impact it will have once launched. This is a system which will underpin the technical and legal infrastructure of childcare for many years to come.

In order to fast-track some of the benefits of the new scheme, last September I introduced a series of measures to make childcare more affordable for Irish families. I am delighted to report that take up of these measures has exceeded all of our targets. The new universal subsidy, worth up to €1,040 per year for children under three in registered childcare is now benefitting the families of more than 36,000 children, while almost 40,000 children that will benefit most from enhanced supports are receiving up to €145 per week towards the cost of their childcare.

I have confirmed that these supports will remain in place until the Affordable Childcare Scheme goes live.

### **Family Resource Centres**

195. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of family resource centres; and her plans to roll out more centres. [21593/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Family support is an important priority for me, and the increased level of funding for Family Resource Centres in 2018 reflects this.

Family Resource Centres are front-line services rooted in the communities they serve. Acting as a focal point within their communities, Family Resource Centres provide a holistic service of child, family and community support and advocacy to all children and families in their communities.

At the end of 2017, there were 109 Family Resource Centres in receipt of funding from Tusla. In 2018, Tusla was provided with additional funding of €1.76m to expand the programme with the inclusion of 11 additional centres, bringing the total number of Family Resource Centres to 120. The 11 new centres will be operational before the end of 2018.

Existing Family Resource Centres will also receive an increase of up to €10,000 in funding this year.

Funding for Family Resource Centres differs, depending on a range of factors, including:

- the size and population of the catchment area,
- the degree of economic disadvantage in the area, and
- the existing distribution of services in the area.

Decisions with regard to funding levels in 2019 will be taken in the context of the Estimates process. It is not possible at this stage to advise on what level of funding will be available to the Family Resource Centre Programme next year.

I am pleased to have been in a position to support the work of Family Resource Centres

this year through the targeting of additional resources to services that will impact positively on vulnerable children and families.

### **Social Workers Recruitment**

196. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans with regard to recruiting more social workers. [21594/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I acknowledge that the recruitment and retention of social workers is one of the biggest challenges for Tusla, with only 200-250 graduating per year in a very competitive labour market.

I am fully supportive of Tusla's proactive approach to recruiting, supporting and retaining staff across all grades. In support of this I have provided for a significant increase in Tusla's funding allocation with an increase of €40.6m in 2018 and a total increase of €144m since its establishment in 2014. Given this level of funding, Tusla expects to increase its total workforce by approximately 422 in 2018 resulting in a total workforce of 4118 whole time equivalents (WTE) by the end of the year.

Given the current limited availability of social work graduates, Tusla expects at least 45 of these staff to be additional social workers. There will also be proactive recruitment of grades such as social care and clerical administration staff to support social workers to ensure that they can focus on their core tasks.

To support Tusla's ambitious recruitment targets it launched its 2018 graduate recruitment campaign last September. This campaign is currently open for applications with interviews expected to commence in May/June 2018. The campaign included Northern Ireland and Scotland. Continuing Tusla Recruit's proactive approach of previous years all campuses were visited and over 200 students registered their interest. Tusla Recruit maintains on-going communications with the registered students and partners them through the application and CORU registration process with a view to making Tusla an employer of choice.

Tusla also has an on-going rolling campaign to attract existing social workers who have a particular interest in working in child protection. This campaign is also designed to appeal to social workers who may currently be living abroad and wish to return to or move to Ireland.

I have also asked Tusla to develop a Multi-annual Strategic Workforce Plan for 2019 and beyond to identify the future composition of Tusla's workforce with regard to delivering on Tusla's priorities. I expect the Plan to encompass a range of activities aimed at addressing Tusla's short, medium and long term needs and to manage the current challenges Tusla faces recruiting social workers. The Plan will also form the basis of engaging with key stakeholders such as the education sector to ensure a sustainable supply of social workers in the future.

### **Early Childhood Care and Education Expenditure**

197. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the full year cost of increasing the ECCE capitation grant by 10%; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21632/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme operates over a 38 week programme year from the beginning of September to the end of June. Currently, to deliver this programme, pre-

school providers receive a standard capitation of €64.50 per child per week. If a provider has been approved for higher capitation the weekly capitation payment increases to €75 per child. Higher Capitation is paid for individual ECCE sessions where the ECCE Room leader holds the appropriate qualification.

The ECCE capitation paid to pre-school providers will increase by 7% in September 2018. This increase will result in the following:

- Standard capitation rate increasing from €64.50 to €69
- Higher capitation rate increasing from €75 to €80.25

It is estimated that approximately 114,000 children will be registered for the 2018/19 programme year.

If the ECCE capitation rates were increased by a further 10%, the standard rate would increase to €75.90 and the higher rate would increase to €88.28.

Assuming 114,000 registrations (with all children taking their full time entitlement) and no change to the current breakdown between standard and higher rate capitation rates, the full cost of the ECCE Programme, with a 10% increase in capitation, would be an additional €32m - bringing the full year cost to €355.5m in 2018/19.

### Community Childcare Subvention Programme

198. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the full year cost of increasing the affordable childcare subsidy for children under three years of age by €1 per hour; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21633/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I am replying to the Deputy on the understanding that he is referring to the Community Childcare Subvention (Universal) Scheme (CCSU).

In September 2017, as part of Government policy to make childcare more affordable, I introduced a universal childcare subvention payment of up to €20 per week for families using eligible childcare providers for the care of children aged from 6 months to the first eligible point of entry to the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme.

The maximum weekly universal childcare subsidy is €20. CCSU subsidies are currently paid according to session type, i.e. full-time, part-time, sessional, half-sessional. The maximum weekly universal subsidy rate of €20 is paid on a pro-rata basis according to session type and is not paid on an hourly basis. Please see the following table for a breakdown of the rates per session type.

**Table 1: Universal Subsidy (CCSU) rates**

UCS Session Type	Weekly Subsidy
Full-time (i.e. 5 hours plus per day)	€20
Part-time (i.e. 3 hours 31 mins to 5 hours per day)	€10
Sessional (i.e. 2 hours 16 mins to 3 hours 30 mins per day)	€7
Half-sessional (i.e. 1 hour 15 mins to 2 hours 15 mins per day)	€3.50

The subsidy-rates according to session type are based on a rate of 50 cents per hour, allocated pro rata depending on the number of hours per week the child attends a childcare service. The maximum rate of €20 per week - for full-time childcare - is based on 40 hours of childcare per week.

On the basis of the number of children availing of the universal payment across all session types in the week ending April 30 2018, assuming no change in demand, the table below shows estimates of the full year cost of CCSU at the current rate of 50 cent per hour and the projected full year cost of CCSU if increased by €1 per hour to €1.50 per hour. It should be stressed that the projected full-year cost of €51.3m is based on an assumption that the demand for childcare would not change in response to the increase in the universal subsidy. If the increased subsidy were to lead to an increase in the demand for childcare, then the cost of the measure would rise accordingly.

**Table 2: Projected cost of CCSU**

Full year cost of CCSU at 50c per hour	Full year cost of CCSU at €1.50 per hour
€17,085,831	€51,257,493

### **Scheme to Support National Organisations**

199. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of the consultation on the future direction of the scheme to support national organisations; when the consultation process will be finalised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21563/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The Scheme to Support National Organisations (SSNO) has a primary focus on the provision of core funding to national organisations that demonstrate good governance and deliver services and supports that have a focus on one or more of the following: addressing poverty, social exclusion and promoting equality. The current scheme is due to close in 2019 and my Department has invited submissions on the future direction of the SSNO from participants and other stakeholders.

This invitation was circulated on 1 May 2018 and stakeholders were informed that completed written submissions should be returned to my Department on or before 5pm, 31 May 2018. Submissions received will be taken into consideration in the design of the next iteration of the scheme.

Other key considerations in the re-design will be my Department's Strategic Goals as set out in its *Statement of Strategy 2017-2020* and the Government's policy objectives as outlined in *Our Communities: A Framework Policy for Local and Community Development in Ireland* (2015).

### **Charities Regulation**

200. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of appeals heard by the Charity Appeals Tribunal to date; the status of the outcome of the appeals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21564/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** Section 75 (1) of the Charities Act 2009 provides for the establishment of the Charities Appeal Tribunal. The role of the Charity Appeals Tribunal is to hear and adjudicate on appeals against certain

decisions of the Charities Regulatory Authority (the ‘Charities Regulator’).

I have recently consented to the making of the rules for the Appeals Tribunal to conduct future appeals. I am advised that the Chairperson of the Appeal Tribunal is satisfied with same and it is anticipated that he will formally sign off on these Rules shortly.

The Tribunal will be required as far as practicable to ensure that appeals are dealt with and determined expeditiously. My Department estimates that there will be a small number of appeals made to the Tribunal annually.

### **Ministerial Meetings**

201. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she has recently met with her UK counterpart; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21504/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I met with the UK Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the Right Honourable Esther McVey, on Monday 23 April 2018.

My key area of concern is the impact of Brexit on the current reciprocal arrangements for social insurance and social assistance schemes and child benefit between Ireland and the UK, including Northern Ireland. The importance of maintaining the Common Travel Area was acknowledged in Prime Minister May’s letter of 29 March 2017 triggering Article 50 of the TEU, in the Joint EU/UK Progress report agreed at the European Council on 15 December 2017 and it is reflected in the protocol to the draft Withdrawal Agreement published by the Commission on 28 February 2018.

At that meeting, I emphasised my objective to ensure that the reciprocity of civic rights and social welfare rights and entitlements, which currently exist for Irish and UK citizens moving within Ireland and between Ireland and Britain under the Common Travel Area, are safeguarded and maintained.

It was a very positive meeting. I am happy that we have a broad agreement to preserve the status quo in the field of social security for both Irish and UK citizens moving within the Common Travel Area.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Social Welfare Benefits Applications**

202. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a carer’s and domiciliary care allowance will be awarded to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21514/18]

**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.

Domiciliary care allowance (DCA) is a monthly payment for a child aged less than 16 years of age, with a severe disability, who requires ongoing care and attention, substantially over and

16 May 2018

above the care and attention usually required by a child of the same age. It is not means tested.

CA can only be paid in respect of children aged less than 16 years where domiciliary care allowance (DCA) is being paid in respect of the child.

I confirm that my department received an application for CA and DCA from the person concerned on the 24 April 2018.

DCA applications received in early March 2018 are currently being finalised. This application will be considered by a deciding officer and the decision notified to her as soon as possible.

Once a decision is made on the entitlement to DCA, a deciding officer can proceed to examine the entitlement to CA. Once processed, the person concerned will be notified of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Carer's Allowance Payments**

203. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when arrears in respect of a carer's allowance will issue to a person (details supplied) in view of the fact the payment was first awarded on 12 April 2017; and if the details of same will be provided. [21532/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a person who has such a disability that they require that level of care.

CA was awarded to the person concerned from 20 April 2017 and the first payment issued to his nominated bank account on 20 April 2017. The person concerned was notified of these details on 12 April 2017.

Carer's Allowance cannot be paid to more than one person in respect of any period. As CA was in payment to another person, in respect of the care recipient involved, up to 19 April 2017, there are no arrears of CA due in this case.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Jobseeker's Allowance Data**

204. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons under 26 years of age on rates of jobseeker's allowance of €198.00, €152.80 and €107.70 in tabular form. [21555/18]

205. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons under 26 years of age on rates of jobseeker's allowance other than €198.00, €152.80 and €107.70 in tabular form. [21556/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 204 and 205 together.

The Deputy should note that all recipients of Jobseeker's Allowance aged from 18 to 24

have a personal rate of €107.70, except for people in the following categories (who qualify for a non-age-reduced personal rate of €198.00):

- People with dependent children;
- People transferring from Disability Allowance to Jobseeker's Allowance;
- People who were in the care of the Child and Family Agency during the 12 months before reaching 18.

Similarly, all recipients of Jobseeker's Allowance aged from 25 have a personal rate of €152.80, except for people in the following categories (who qualify for a non-age-reduced personal rate of €198.00):

- People with dependent children;
- People transferring from Disability Allowance to Jobseeker's Allowance.

This means that the only three possible personal payment rates for Jobseeker's Allowance recipients are those referred to in the Deputy's questions – that is, €198.00, €152.80 and €107.70.

Some of these recipients may receive reduced personal payments in a particular week or weeks, due to the impact of means and/or the application of penalty rates, but these reductions do not change the underlying personal rate of payment to which the recipient is entitled.

Accordingly, the attached tabular statement shows the numbers of Jobseeker's Allowance recipients aged 18 to 25 on the Live Register at end-April by year of age and by personal payment rate (€198.00, €152.80 and €107.70).

**Table 1 - Number of Jobseeker's Allowance recipients (on Live Register) by year of age and maximum personal weekly rate of payment (€)**

	Weekly payment rate	Weekly payment rate	Weekly payment rate
Recipients of age	€107.70	€152.80	€198.00
18	1,539		61
19	2,331		182
20	2,353		283
21	2,239		382
22	2,014		461
23	1,928		561
24	1,690	9	648
25	1	2,010	785
Total	14,095	2,019	3,363

### Jobseeker's Allowance Expenditure

206. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the expenditure required in a full financial year to restore persons under 26 years of age on the reduced rate of jobseeker's allowance to the full weekly rate of €198. [21557/18]

207. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the expenditure required in a full financial year to increase the jobseeker's allowance payment for persons under 26 years of age on the €152.80 rate to €170.40 per week. [21558/18]

208. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the expenditure required in a full financial year to increase the jobseeker's allowance payment for persons under 26 years of age on the €107.70 rate to €150.35 per week. [21559/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 206 to 208, inclusive, together.

The main social welfare schemes for people who are unemployed are the jobseeker's allowance and jobseeker's benefit schemes which provide income support for people who have lost work and are unable to find alternative full-time employment. The 2018 Estimates for my Department provide for expenditure this year on the jobseekers' schemes of €2.17 billion.

In line with other EU and OECD jurisdictions where such measures feature, reduced rates for younger jobseeker's allowance recipients were first introduced in 2009 and extended to those under 26 in Budget 2014. Lower weekly rates for younger jobseeker's allowance recipients were introduced to protect young people from welfare dependency by providing them with a strong financial incentive to engage in education or training or to take up employment. Where a young jobseeker participates on an education or training programme they will receive a higher weekly payment of €198 which is the maximum personal rate for jobseeker's allowance.

The reduced rates of jobseekers allowance do not apply to 18 -25 year olds with a qualified child, those making a claim for jobseekers allowance where that claim is linked to a jobseekers allowance claim made within the previous 12 months to which the maximum personal rate applied, those transferring directly from jobseekers allowance from disability allowance. The reduced rates also do not apply to 18-24 year olds who were in the care of the Child and Family Agency (TUSLA) during the period of 12 months before they reached the age of 18.

The total cost of expenditure required in a full financial year to restore people under 26 years of age on the reduced rate of jobseekers allowance to the full weekly rate of €198 would be approximately €94 million. The total personal rate cost of increasing the jobseekers allowance payment for 25 year olds i.e. people under 26 years of age on the €152.80 weekly rate to €170.40 per week would be approximately €2.5 million. The total personal rate cost of increasing the jobseeker's allowance payment for 18-24 year olds i.e. people under 26 years of age on the €107.70 weekly rate to €150.35 per week would be approximately €39 million. It should be noted that this estimate is subject to change over the coming months in the context of emerging trends and associated revision of the estimated numbers of recipients for 2018.

I have no plans for any further increases in rates at present and any such changes could only be considered in a budgetary context.

### **Working Family Payment Data**

209. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 429 of 1 May 2018, the number of the 3,423 families in receipt of WFP in the public sector in each area, section or department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21587/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Working Family Payment (WFP) formerly known as Family Income Supplement (FIS) is a weekly tax-free payment which provides additional income support to employees on low earnings with children.

Based on Occupation Code data held by the Department, there are currently 3,422 families

in receipt of WFP where the principal employed person is classified as a public servant, that is, in the civil or public service. The Department does not compile data in respect of WFP customers employed in the public and civil service by area, section or Department.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Disability Allowance Eligibility**

210. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 433 of 1 May 2018, the position in relation to the obligation of parents to retain receipts of evidence of expenditure; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21613/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** Social welfare legislation provides that where a person is medically certified as being unable to manage their own financial affairs, the Minister may appoint an agent who is responsible for collecting the person's social welfare payment and acting on their behalf, with a duty to act in the best interests of the person. The agent may be a parent or other qualified person.

The appointed agent is responsible for ensuring that all payments received are used to the benefit of the person and in their best interest. They are also required, under the legislation, to keep a record of all transactions involving the monies received and produce these records when requested to do so by an officer of the Minister.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Carer's Allowance Applications**

211. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a review of an application for carer's allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21647/18]

**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 the 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 evidence was supplied on 25 July 2017, there were still documents outstanding. As a result, the deciding officer confirmed the original decision.

16 May 2018

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 again 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.

The file was received back from the SWI on 8 May 2018. The SWI reported that contrary to a previous declaration, the person concerned was engaged in employment outside his home up to January 2018. The person concerned stated that he was an employee yet was unable to show evidence or payslips that would confirm this or show how many hours per week he was working or what his earnings were.

On 11 May 2018 a deciding officer requested evidence of his earnings and hours of employment from the date of his application for CA up to January 2018.

On receipt of this information, the decision to disallow the application of the person concerned will be reviewed and he will be notified in writing of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Partial Capacity Benefit Scheme Appeals**

212. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a review of an application for partial capacity benefit by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21648/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Partial Capacity Benefit (PCB) is a social welfare scheme which allows claimants to return to work (if they have reduced capacity to work) and continue to receive a payment from my Department. To qualify they need to be currently in receipt of either Illness Benefit (for a minimum of 6 months) or Invalidity Pension.

In the case referred to by the Deputy, my Department received an application for PCB on 3 August 2017. However, they were not, at that point, in receipt of Illness Benefit (for six months). While they were previously in receipt of Illness Benefit, there was a break in their claim and a new claim was commenced from 28 July 2017.

I understand that the person concerned has appealed this decision to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO). When a determination is received from the SWAO the matter will be further considered.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Partial Capacity Benefit Scheme Applications**

213. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a partial capacity benefit application for a person (details supplied); when a decision will be made; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21662/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** Partial Capacity Benefit (PCB) is a social welfare scheme which

allows a person return to employment if they have reduced capacity for work and to continue to receive a payment from my Department. A person who applies for PCB will, in the first instance, be assessed by a Medical Assessor who expresses an opinion on the degree of partial capacity. A person assessed with a moderate restriction on capacity for work gets 50% of their personal rate of payment plus any increases due in respect of an adult dependant and children. A person assessed with a severe work restriction gets 75% and a person assessed with a profound level gets 100%.

An application for PCB from the person concerned was received on 6 December 2017. The Illness Benefit of the person was stopped as they returned to work on 27 November 2017. The case was referred for a medical assessment. On this occasion it was found necessary for the person to attend an in-person medical assessment and this was carried out on 25 April 2018.

Following this, it has been decided that the person is entitled to 50% of their previous rate of Illness Benefit backdated to the date they returned to work. Payment will issue as soon as possible.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Household Benefits Scheme**

214. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the cost of increasing the monthly electricity allowance and the natural gas allowance by €10 per month per applicant; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21699/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The cost of increasing the monthly electricity allowance and the natural gas allowance by €10 per month per applicant is estimated to be €47.9 million and €5.9 million respectively.

These costs are on a full year basis and are based on the estimated number of recipients in 2019. It should be noted that these costings are subject to change in the context of emerging trends and associated revision of the estimated numbers of recipients for 2019.

### **Legislative Measures**

215. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if legislative change will be brought forward to enable the Revenue Commissioners discretion in cases in which it allows for cash balance schemes to be exempted from purchasing annuities to also include schemes such as the second IASS supplementary funds, in order to facilitate persons to transfer into an ARF especially those in receipt of pension and past their normal retirement date. [21709/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Section 48 of the Pensions Act sets out the priorities on winding up a scheme. It sets out the order in which the liabilities must be discharged and how they may be discharged for members. When a scheme winds up, section 48(3)(b) provides that the trustees may, notwithstanding anything contained in the rules of the scheme and without the consent of the member concerned, discharge the liability for benefits payable by any member by one of the following: transferring the benefits of each member into a new pension scheme; purchasing an approved assurance policy with a company or insurance agency that sells life insurance; or transferring the benefits into another arrangement for the provision of retirement benefits such as, for example, a PRSA

or a buyout bond. It must be noted that this is a discretionary provision and the trustees are not compelled to discharge the liability in this way.

The wind-up options in section 48(3)(b) are contingent on the requirement that the scheme's policies or contracts are approved by the Revenue Commissioners under the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, as amended. That Act sets out the circumstances in which retirement benefit schemes are approved by the Revenue Commissioners for tax purposes.

In other words, transfers from the scheme being wound up must be made into schemes or products approved by the Revenue Commissioners and which, therefore, comply with Revenue rules.

Section 772 of the Taxes Consolidation Act allows for flexible options on retirement, i.e., the approved retirement fund (ARF) option. The purchase of an ARF is not available to members of defined benefit schemes, subject to certain exceptions. Legislation and policy on taxes and access to ARFs are a matter for the Department of Finance.

ARFs are post-retirement investment vehicles but the sale of ARFs is not currently regulated as a pension product. Under Strand 3 of the 'Roadmap for Pensions Reform' the Government has committed to undertaking a broad review of the utilisation of the ARF option and consider whether regulatory oversight of this product is fit for purpose. This review will be undertaken by the Interdepartmental Pensions Reform and Taxation Group (IDPRTG) which aims to have it completed by the end of this year. The IDPRTG is chaired by the Department of Finance and includes the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform as well as my Department.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Back to Education Allowance Eligibility**

216. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the financial supports that are available to a person in receipt of a widowed pension that wants to pursue a postgraduate diploma through distance education in terms of course costs and living expenses; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21710/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Back to Education Allowance scheme (BTEA) supports persons who have been in receipt of a social welfare payment, including the Widows, Widowers or Surviving Partners payments, to pursue full-time courses of education at second and third level subject to meeting the qualifying conditions. In general, access to the BTEA at postgraduate level (*QQI levels 8 & 9 (masters)*) is not permitted under the terms of the BTEA scheme.

Consequently, jobseekers proposing to study for postgraduate qualifications for masters such as MA, MSc, M.Eng, M.Phil., MBA and Professional Graduate Diploma are not eligible for BTEA funding.

The only exceptions where BTEA can be approved at postgraduate level is where the jobseekers intend to undertake studies leading to:

(i) Professional Masters in Education (QQI level 9) which replaced the Professional Diploma in Education from September 2014;

(ii) *Master degree* based solely on life experience where the applicant holds no other third level qualification. In such cases, a Case Officer must ensure that the applicant provides docu-

mentary evidence from the third-level institution confirming that admission is based solely on life experience and that the applicant is not the holder of any third level qualification;

(iii) Higher Diploma (H.Dip) in any discipline (QQI level 8); and

(iv) Certain Springboard courses – (QQI level 8).

My Department does not offer specific supports for students pursuing third-level qualifications through distance learning or online courses under the back to education programme.

BTEA is not intended to be an alternative form of funding for people entering or re-entering the third level education system. The Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) Grant, payable by the Department of Education and Skills, represents the primary support for persons pursuing education. The eligibility rules that govern the payment of a student maintenance grant are a matter for that Department.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Departmental Reports**

217. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a report (details supplied) on local employment services and jobs clubs will be published; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21716/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** My Department commissioned Indecon to conduct a review of the Local Employment and Jobclub services. This review is the first significant independent review that has been commissioned since the Local Employment Services (LES) was established in 1995 and it will help inform future decisions regarding how the Department contracts, monitors and procures for LES.

My officials are currently working through the final report and it will be submitted to my office shortly. The findings will be discussed with the contractors and their observations sought. In regard to publication, the report contains commercial information relating to LES contractors and my Department must consider any obligations under the terms of the contracts.

### **Septic Tank Registration Scheme**

218. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to change the deadline of registration of septic tanks from 1 February 2013 to enable those that registered their existing septic tanks to avail of a grant for remedial works required after inspection; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21530/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** The Domestic Waste Water Treatment Systems (Financial Assistance) Regulations 2013, a copy of which is available in the Oireachtas library, brought into operation a grant scheme to assist with the cost of remediation of septic tanks and domestic waste water treatment systems which are deemed, following inspection under the Environmental Protection Agency's National Inspection Plan, to require repair or upgrading.

The Regulations provide that, subject to the applicant meeting all qualification criteria, a local authority may pay a grant to a person who is required, following an inspection, to undertake repairs or upgrades to, or replacement of, a septic tank or other domestic waste water treatment

system. Applications for grant aid are administered by the local authority in whose functional area the particular domestic waste water treatment system requiring remediation is situated. The local authorities then seek recoupment of the amounts paid from my Department. Where a local authority pays a grant under the scheme, my Department will reimburse to the local authority 100% of the amount paid.

Full details of the scheme, including eligibility criteria, are set out in the explanatory leaflet and application form published on my Department's website at the following link:

*<http://www.housing.gov.ie/water/water-quality/domestic-waste-water-systems/septic-tanks/domestic-waste-water-treatment-0>* .

The grants scheme ensures that the limited financial resources available are targeted towards householders, particularly those on lower incomes, who incur expenditure directly as a result of the inspection scheme. My Department is revising this scheme to better support the programme of measures in the finalised River Basin Management Plan 2018 - 2021 published recently. The scheme is being extended in order to provide particular support to high status waters and areas identified for priority action in the River Basin Management Plan.

I have recently approved the establishment of a Working Group to conduct a review of the wider investment needs relating to rural water services. The review will focus on the actions required to improve and sustain rural water services and will consider issues such as governance, supervision and monitoring of the sector, in addition to capital investment priorities and requirements across all elements of rural water services, including domestic waste water treatment systems. The establishment of the Working Group is being undertaken in response to the recommendations of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Future Funding of Domestic Water Services.

The organisations that are participating on the Working Group reflect the importance and wide ranging impact of the Rural Water Sector. In addition to my Department, the Working Group is to comprise the Department of Rural and Community Development, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Health Service Executive, the National Federation of Group Water Schemes and the County and City Management Association. It is expected that the Working Group will consult with other relevant stakeholders in respect of specific topics under consideration.

Householders who do not meet the eligibility criteria for the grant under the aforementioned Regulations and who wish to remediate or upgrade their on-site treatment systems may qualify for relief under the Home Renovation Incentive (HRI) Scheme introduced pursuant to section 5 of the Finance (No. 2) Act 2013. The HRI Scheme covers main residence repairs, renovations and improvements, including the repair or replacement of septic tanks. The Scheme is administered by the Revenue Commissioners and full details are published on the Revenue Commissioners' website at *[www.revenue.ie](http://www.revenue.ie)* .

### **Capital Expenditure Programme**

219. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount in the capital budget as set out in table 8 of the Stability Programme Update 2018 that is designated for housing that is meeting the commitments contained in Rebuilding Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21630/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** The information requested is being compiled and will be forwarded to the Deputy in accordance

with Standing Orders.

### **Legislative Programme**

220. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the electoral commission Bill; if it will encompass regulation of social media; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21895/18]

224. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the preparation of legislation for the establishment of an electoral commission; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21561/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 220 and 224 together.

The 2016 report of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Environment, Culture and the Gaeltacht on the establishment of an electoral commission is informing the implementation of the commitment in A Programme for a Partnership Government on establishing an electoral commission and the preparation of an Electoral Commission Bill to give effect to that. The Joint Oireachtas Committee did not make any specific recommendations about the commission having a role in regulating social media. No decisions have been made about the functions of the commission and are still under consideration. Meanwhile, work is ongoing in my Department in preparing, in the first instance, a Regulatory Impact Analysis for the Bill.

### **Rental Accommodation Scheme Data**

221. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of RAS properties unoccupied for more than one month by county in each the years 2016, 2017, and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21500/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** My Department does not hold any data on RAS properties that have been vacant for more than one month, as recoupment payments to local authorities only cease after a property has been unoccupied for 3 months. I refer to the reply to Question No. 240 of 26 April 2018, wherein I provided details of the number of RAS properties, broken down by local authority area, unoccupied for a period of more than 3-months during 2016 and the reasons as to why properties may be vacant for a period of time. Data on 2017 RAS vacancies is currently being collated by my Department. Data on 2018 RAS vacancies is not yet available.

### **Housing Data**

222. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the average cost of one, two, three and four bedroom local authority new build apartments on the basis of costings submitted to his Department by local authorities over the past 12 months; the details of all costs and construction only costs; and the itemised costed list of the individual non-construction costs for each unit size. [21507/18]

226. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the average cost of one, two, three and four bedroomed local authority new build units on

the basis of costings submitted by local authorities over the past 12 months; the details of all in costs and construction only costs; and the itemised costed list of the individual non-construction costs for each unit size. [21568/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 222 and 226 together.

The information sought in relation to average costs, to the extent and in the format to which it is readily available, is set out in the table. The average costs set out are based on the analysis of returned data from tendered social housing schemes over an extended period. Construction cost figures are reflective of building costs (including VAT) and also include normal site works and site development. All-in costs include cost of construction, land cost, professional fees, utility connections, site investigations/surveys, archaeology where appropriate, and contribution to public art. Abnormal costs are excluded from these figures.

	1 bed	2 bed (1 storey)	2 bed (2 storey)	3 bed	4 bed	1 bed Apt.	2 bed Apt.	3 bed Apt.
Construction	€143,750	€149,576	€157,771	€167,224	€176,629	€150,918	€157,065	€173,953
All-in	€182,944	€189,644	€198,491	€209,106	€219,694	€192,068	€199,112	€218,818

My Department continues to maintain a clear focus on delivering value for money on both the construction and all-in costs of social housing projects.

### Homelessness Strategy

223. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the actions he is taking to address homelessness among persons between 18 to 24 years of age; the further actions he is taking or planning to take to address the needs of persons over 18 years of age that are leaving care and in need of housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21560/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of homeless accommodation and related services rests with individual housing authorities.

The long-term solution to the current homelessness challenge is to increase the supply of homes. Accordingly, the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness is designed to accelerate all types of housing supply; in particular, it seeks to increase the delivery of social housing by 50,000 units over the period to 2021.

Also contained in the Plan is a cross-Government action to ensure that young people leaving State care and at risk of homelessness are identified and catered for through appropriate housing and other supports appropriate for their needs. My Department will allocate specific funding under the Capital Assistance Scheme for the accommodation needs, while the health and independent living supports will be provided by the HSE, Tusla and expert NGOs.

In October 2017, I established an Inter-Agency Group on Homelessness. The group's function is to bring about greater coherence and coordination in the provision of homelessness related services across the relevant Government organisations, including health and social care

supports, welfare, employment and social protection supports, family supports as well as housing and emergency accommodation services.

To achieve this, the Group is considering the respective roles and responsibilities of all the organisations involved, including funded service providers, in the delivery of homelessness related services. I expect to receive the Group's report shortly and will consider it without delay.

*Question No. 224 answered with Question No. 220.*

### **Legislative Programme**

225. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the building control (construction industry register Ireland) Bill will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21562/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English):** Stronger compliance with building standards and the broader building control reform agenda are critical priorities for the Government, and a commitment has been given to placing the Construction Industry Register Ireland, or CIRI, on a statutory footing. CIRI was established on a voluntary basis in 2014 and over 800 building and contracting entities are currently included on the register.

At the end of May 2017, the Government approved the draft heads of a Bill to place the CIRI on a statutory footing and the Bill was referred to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government for pre-legislative scrutiny. The Committee's report was received on 14 December 2017 and its recommendations are being considered with a view to progressing the drafting as soon as possible.

Once enacted in due course, the legislation will provide consumers who engage a registered builder with the assurance that they are dealing with a competent and compliant operator and will complement the reforms which have been made through the Building Control (Amendment) Regulations 2014 and contribute to the development of an enhanced culture of competence and compliance in the construction sector.

*Question No. 226 answered with Question No. 222.*

### **Local Authority Housing Provision**

227. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the details of a planned turnkey social housing project (details supplied) in County Cork; if funding has been provided to Cork County Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21616/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Funding approval for the turnkey social housing project was given to Cork County Council on 6 April 2018. It is now a matter for the local authority to advance this project.

### **Pyrite Remediation Programme Implementation**

228. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government

the reason residents who have moved out of dwellings which are being remediated under the pyrite remediation scheme are reimbursed for expenditure during their absence on electricity, gas and other utilities but not for the portion in relation to the PSO levy, VAT, standing charges and so on in view of the fact that they have had to pay the amount in properties they are renting during the remediation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21649/18]

**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 pyrite remediation scheme is a scheme of “last resort” 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](http://www.pyriteboard.ie).

In accordance with the provisions of the Act, the Board is independent in the performance of its functions, and as Minister, I have no role in the operational matters pertaining to the implementation of the scheme. The Board may be contacted by phone at Lo call 1890 252842 or by email to [info@pyriteboard.ie](mailto:info@pyriteboard.ie) or alternatively at [oireachtasinfo@pyriteboard.ie](mailto:oireachtasinfo@pyriteboard.ie).

The scheme provides for the recoupment of the vouched cost of alternative accommodation, furniture removal and storage subject to limits of €3,000 and €2,500 (inclusive of VAT), respectively. However, where a scheme participant can satisfy the Housing Agency, who will be making the payments, in advance that suitable rental accommodation cannot be obtained for €3,000 or less the expenses for the accommodation and furniture removal can be combined, subject to the overall limit of €5,500.

My Department is in regular contact with the Pyrite Resolution Board and the Housing Agency in relation to the implementation of the scheme and is satisfied that the arrangements that are currently in place provide the necessary flexibility to support scheme participants in meeting their alternative accommodation needs while their homes are under remediation.

In regard to expenditure on utilities, the Housing Agency’s publication Guide for Scheme Participants provides information to applicants whose dwellings have been included in the Scheme. Section 3.4 Dwelling Remediation, provides that the Scheme participant is responsible for notifying service providers and is not required to disconnect their utility services. I understand from the Housing Agency that the works contractor will pay for any electricity used in connection with the remedial works.

The Public Service Obligation Levy (PSO) is mandated by the Government and approved by the European Commission to support the generation of electricity from sustainable, renewable and indigenous sources. The levy is calculated and certified annually by the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) in accordance with relevant legislation and all energy suppliers are required to collect this levy from customers. In this regard, neither I as Minister, nor the Pyrite Resolution Board have any role or function in relation to the payment of such levies or standing charges which is a matter for the CRU. Further information is available at [www.cru.ie](http://www.cru.ie).

### **Ministerial Meetings**

229. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht when she last met and will next meet a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21495/18]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** I last

met with the person referred to by the Deputy on Wednesday 24 January 2018 and would expect to meet that person again from time to time in the course of business.

### Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge

230. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** den Aire Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta cé mhéad cruinniú a bhí ag an gCoiste Comhairleach a bunaíodh in 2014 chun comhairle agus aiseolas a chur ar fáil maidir le cur i bhfeidhm na Straitéise 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge, 2010-2030, san iomlán ó bunaíodh é; agus cé mhéad cruinniú a bhí ag an gCoiste Comhairleach sa bhliain 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017 agus 2018. [21508/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Tá na sonraí atá iarrtha ag an Teachta maidir le líon na gcruinnithe a bhí ag an gCoiste Comhairleach leagtha amach sa tábla a leanas:

Bliain	Líon cruinnithe
2014	3
2015	1
2016	0
2017	1
2018	Tá beartaithe cruinniú a thionól go luath.
Iomlán	5 go dáta

### Wildlife Conservation

231. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if the use of Larsen traps as part of the curlew conservation programme will be discontinued; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21588/18]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** There are a number of native Irish breeding birds, particularly ground nesting birds, that are of priority conservation concern and have been “red-listed”. This includes Curlew, which has declined by 97% in Ireland since the 1980s and which needs significant effort to stabilise the population and save it from extinction in Ireland.

One of the primary issues for Curlew (and other ground nesting birds) is been excessive predation rates, including by corvids (especially Grey Crows and Magpies).

Magpies and Grey Crows are legally and humanely controlled by professional operatives on contract to the *National Parks and Wildlife Service* of my Department, in a targeted and very localised way in the vicinity of Curlew breeding sites. This is to help this rare and threatened species rear its young, without eggs or chicks being taken. Larsen traps are used as an effective part of this effort to save the Curlew and are used by conservation bodies across Ireland and Britain in efforts to support a range of threatened species from predation.

### Hare Coursing Regulation

232. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if, in view of expert reports that hare numbers have significantly reduced here, she will consider

16 May 2018

a suspension of all hare hunting and use of wild hares in coursing in order that the population can regrow; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21643/18]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** My Department is not aware of any expert reports which indicate a national decline in the population of hares.

EU Directive 92/43/EEC (the Habitats Directive) requires Ireland to make a detailed report every six years on the conservation status of all listed species, including the hare. Ireland's most recent report in 2013 included a comprehensive assessment of the range, population status, habitat and threats for the Irish hare. The report can be downloaded at <https://www.npws.ie/article-17-reports-0/article-17-reports-2013>.

The 2013 report stated that the Hare is found throughout the country from coastal habitats to upland heath and bog. The Hare is widespread and common in Ireland with a broad habitat niche. None of the identified threats are considered likely to impact on its conservation status in the foreseeable future and the Overall Conservation Status was assessed as Favourable.

In addition to the reporting requirements of the EU Habitats Directive, data on the distribution of the hare is being collected continuously by the National Biodiversity Data Centre and the recent *Atlas of Mammals in Ireland 2010-2015* provided a summary of the species' range, demonstrating that it remains widespread across the country.

My Department recently commissioned a new assessment of the status of hare's population in Ireland. The survey work to inform this population assessment has already begun with the main survey work occurring over the 2018/19 winter period. The final report is due in mid-2019.

In relation to hare coursing meetings, the recent 2017/18 hare coursing season finished at the end of February last. All reports in relation to the season will be reviewed and all issues arising, including possible breaches of conditions, will be investigated and considered in the context of licenses for the 2018/19 coursing season.