

Written Answers.

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

Questions Nos. 1 to 8, inclusive, answered orally.

Brexit Supports

9. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the uptake of Brexit “Be Prepared” grant supports provided by Enterprise Ireland to date to persons and businesses; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22877/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): My Department, through its agency Enterprise Ireland and Local Enterprise Offices, supports companies in urban and rural areas to start, innovate and remain competitive in international markets, now and into the future. On an annual basis, Enterprise Ireland works with approximately 5,000 companies through a network of market and sector advisers based across 10 national offices and 33 international offices. These manufacturing and internationally traded services companies are a critical source of existing employment and job creation in every county in Ireland.

Brexit presents the most significant economic challenge of the past 50 years, and it is important that we prepare for any long-term structural and disruptive change that may emerge. Being prepared is crucial to ensure resilience to emerging challenges. To promote awareness, and supported by a national *Prepare For Brexit* campaign, Enterprise Ireland designed and launched a €5k *Be Prepared Grant* that supports the costs of SME clients in preparing a plan to mitigate risks and optimise opportunities arising from Brexit. This grant is demand led, and I am confident that Enterprise Ireland has the budgetary resources to meet the needs of all eligible companies who apply for the Grant. To date, 106 Be Prepared Grants have been approved to Enterprise Ireland client companies.

I have also launched a Brexit Working Capital Loan Scheme in April 2018, which will provide affordable working capital financing to eligible businesses. My officials are examining policy proposals for a new longer-term Business Investment Loan Scheme to support businesses.

Enterprise Ireland will continue to promote and develop supports across all counties and regions to ensure that the maximum number of clients are engaged in preparing for the impact of Brexit. These additional schemes include the Strategic Consultancy Grant supports the hiring of an outside consultant to assist the company in devising and/or implementing strategic initiatives aimed at improving business function and resilience. It is designed to facilitate business growth as the consultants can act as coach, mentor, facilitator, analyst, negotiator and/or operator for the company. Up to 50% of the costs incurred in hiring a consultant are available

up to a maximum grant amount of €35,000.

The Market Discovery Fund provides support to companies to assist them in researching the viability of exporting in new or existing markets. The maximum funding is 50% of eligible expenditure up to a maximum grant of €150,000.

EI is continuing to work with companies to help them to become more innovative. The Agile Innovation Fund is an RD&I grant aimed at clients in sectors with rapid design cycles. The application process is simple and quick, with a short timeframe between application and approval.

EI has also rolled out a number of Brexit Advisory Clinics across the country which helps companies to examine their exposure to Brexit and develop effective strategies to mitigate against that exposure.

Enterprise Ireland has also introduced the Brexit: Act On initiative. Under the initiative an independent consultant helps companies to decide on specific actions that they can implement over a short period to enable them to address the risks and avail of the opportunities caused by Brexit.

Questions Nos. 10 and 11 answered orally.

Regional Action Plan for Jobs

12. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation when the second call for collaborative projects under the regional enterprise development fund will be issued; the amount that will be available for successful projects; if the criteria will be the same as for the first call; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22622/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): The REDF is aimed at accelerating economic recovery by delivering on the potential of local and regional strengths. It is a key action to support the Regional Action Plans for Jobs and the Action Plan for Rural Development.

The first call under the Fund was announced in May 2017, with the results released in December 2017. Twenty-one applicants representing all regions of the country secured a total of up to €30.5m in financial support for a range of enterprise and capability development projects.

Minister Humphreys launched the second call of the Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF) on 16th April 2018 with a closing date of 28th June 2018. This call will fund projects with the balance of the €60m remaining under the fund. The criteria for the second call remains the same as that set out for the first call.

A maximum of up to 80% is available for projects, with the balance to be leveraged from the private, community or public sector.

The Fund will support major new collaborative and innovative initiatives that can make a significant impact on enterprise development in the region/across regions or nationally to build the unique potential, strengths and capabilities to grow the regions. Projects must be impactful, with the key impact focus being sustainable job creation.

The fund will consist of 4 streams, as follows:

Stream 1: Major Regional Change Projects

Investment of €2m up to €5m per project (with a minimum of 20% to be leveraged from the private, community or public sector) for major initiatives with high-impact on enterprise development of the region and ability to create jobs, for example in specialized incubators; hubs in design; and initiatives in areas such as medical devices, fintech, agri-tech and food etc.

Stream 2: Regionally Significant Change Projects

Investment of €250,000 up to €2m per project (with a minimum of 20% to be leveraged from the private, community or public sector) for initiatives with high impact at regional/multi-regional level. For example: developing e-working centres; stimulating the development of SME outreach from the third-level education sector; and projects to accelerate start-ups.

Stream 3: Local and Community Enterprise Development Initiative

Investment of €50,000 up to €250,000 per project (with a minimum of 20% to be leveraged from the private, community or public sector) to stimulate the development of community based enterprises and networks. Examples of potential projects include: start-Up/Scaling academies; local networks/ consortia to deliver sectoral growth; and, addressing sectoral challenges around green, energy, digital, or innovation.

Stream 4: Industry Clusters

Investment of €50,000 up to €250,000 per project (with a minimum of 50% to be leveraged from the private, community or public sector) to maximize the benefits of collaborative opportunities through industry clusters, both established and new.

Further information and detail on the schemes is available on Enterprise Ireland's website.

Brexit Supports

13. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the contingencies and supports in place to safeguard SMEs and export businesses in Dublin from a hard Brexit scenario; the supports in place to protect them; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22882/18]

16. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the supports in place to safeguard export businesses and Irish small and medium enterprises from a hard Brexit scenario; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22850/18]

24. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the contingencies and supports in place to safeguard Irish SMEs and export businesses from a hard Brexit scenario; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22861/18]

36. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the contingencies and supports in place to protect Irish companies and exporters from a hard Brexit scenario; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22876/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): I propose to take Questions Nos. 13, 16, 24 and 36 together.

Brexit presents the most significant economic challenge of the past 50 years for businesses in all parts of the country, including Dublin, and my Department and its agencies are working

hard to ensure that potentially impacted firms are taking the necessary steps to prepare and mitigate risks and to take advantage of potential opportunities.

Specifically, my Department provided for additional funding and supports in 2017 and 2018 to enable Enterprise Ireland and the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) to ramp up supports to firms in light of Brexit to sustain employment and to grow and diversify export markets. My Department has also provided additional funding to IDA Ireland to support exporting businesses that may be impacted by Brexit and to compete for new investment opportunities that may arise on foot of Brexit.

EI has launched several initiatives in response to Brexit, including:

- Brexit Scorecard: This interactive online platform can be used by all Irish companies to self-assess their exposure to Brexit under six business pillars.

- Be Prepared Grant: This grant offers SMEs up to €5,000 to assist them in preparing an appropriate Brexit action plan.

- Brexit Advisory Clinics: Recently held in Laois, Mayo, Cavan and Cork. The next Clinic will be in Dublin's Aviva Stadium on 21 June.

- Brexit 'Act On' Programme: This funding is to support the engagement of a consultant to draw up a report with tailored recommendations to help clients address weaknesses and become more resilient.

In addition, EI is implementing extensive trade mission and event schedules focused on global and sectoral opportunities, further developing in-market expertise and networks, placing greater focus on identifying new sectoral opportunities and stimulating demand for Irish products and services through international marketing campaigns. In 2017, EI launched a new Eurozone Strategy to increase exports to Eurozone countries by 50% by 2020.

The LEOs are supporting their clients by providing information, training and mentoring on Brexit related issues as well as advice on other sources of support.

InterTrade Ireland (ITI), has also been very active in assisting businesses address the challenges that Brexit may present for future cross-border commerce. A series of information and awareness raising events have been underway in towns across both North and South over recent months. ITI is also rolling out a 'Start to Plan' readiness voucher scheme, which enables companies to purchase specialist advice in areas such as customs, tax, tariff and non-tariff barriers, legal and labour mobility issues.

Other initiatives that my Department are advancing include the €300 million Brexit Working Capital Loan Scheme, under which accessible finance is made available to businesses at favourable terms.

The work of my Department is focused on supporting businesses throughout the country to withstand current challenges and succeed into the future. All our efforts are aimed at supporting businesses to diversify and compete and to ensure that Ireland will be in a strong position in case of a hard Brexit scenario.

IDA Ireland Portfolio

14. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if her Department will liaise with the IDA to ensure that additional land may be made available

for development in County Wexford; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22625/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): Creating more jobs in the regions is a priority for both the IDA and my Department. I will certainly be focused on doing everything I can to deliver the fairest possible spread of investment across the country. Total employment by FDI companies in Ireland now stands at a landmark 210,443 people which is an increase of 5.3% from 2016. This figure surpasses the overall five-year target of 209,000 which was set in the IDA's 'Winning' strategy. The fact that the IDA has now, only three years into their five-year strategy, reached its total job creation target for that period demonstrates how strong Ireland's FDI offering continues to be for multinationals. This is the highest level of employment from overseas firms in the history of the State and will deliver wide-ranging economic benefits for the people of Ireland.

The Government is also working to ensure a more even distribution of FDI across the country. Last year, IDA Ireland delivered 99 regional investments with 45% of new jobs created outside Dublin. The last three years has seen 30,000 new FDI jobs created outside Dublin.

I can assure the Deputy that the IDA always does its utmost to ensure that overseas firms consider all potential locations when visiting Ireland, including County Wexford. It is important to remember, however, that the final decision as to where to invest always rests with the company concerned.

Wexford has developed a strong base of overseas investment, with 18 IDA client companies employing a total of 2,948 people there. Employment in these firms is also growing, as evidenced by the 10% job growth figure achieved from 2016 to 2017. Total employment in overseas companies in the South-East Region now stands at 14,785 people in 75 client companies. The IDA continues to engage with its client base to help support further employment and investment growth in Wexford and the wider South-East region.

The IDA currently has both sites and buildings available for investment in Wexford. These include lands at the IDA Business & Technology Park and Whitemill Industrial Estate in Wexford Town and at the IDA Business Park in Enniscorthy. Buildings are also available at the IDA Business Park in Enniscorthy and the Whitemill Industrial Estate.

The Agency continues to draw the attention of investors considering locating or expanding in the South East to these different properties. It will also keep the property situation in Wexford under review to help ensure that companies can find the facilities or buildings they need in order to generate jobs and investment for the people of the wider area.

Regional Action Plan for Jobs

15. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the mechanism by which her Department monitors the achievement of goals under the regional action plans for jobs; the progress on each of the goals in each region; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22631/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): This Government has made jobs and enterprise in the regions a top priority.

The Regional Action Plan for Jobs (RAPJs) initiative is a central pillar of the Government's ambition to create 200,000 new jobs by 2020, 135,000 of which are outside of Dublin. A key objective of each of the 8 regional plans is to have a further 10 to 15 per cent at work in each region by 2020, with the unemployment rate of each region not more than one percentage point

greater than the national average.

The Plans are being monitored and driven in each region by Implementation Committees, comprising representatives from the private sector, as well as the Local Authorities, Enterprise Agencies, and other public bodies in the region.

Some of the actions set out in the RAPJs require active engagement with, and the development of networks within, the private sector. To drive this process, key industry figures have been appointed to act as Enterprise Champions within each Region.

Progress to date is good and employment continues to grow strongly.

The reporting of progress on actions under the Regional Action Plan for Jobs is coordinated by my Department in conjunction with the Regional Implementation Committees, Programme Managers and Secretariats. This information is collated through an online reporting tool, managed by my Department. Each Action in the RAPJ has a nominated “owner” of the Action, depending on its area of focus. Across the original eight Regional Action Plan for Jobs, there were 1,276 actions in total.

To date, my Department has published two Progress Reports per Region, with the third and fourth Progress Reports currently being finalised. The fourth Progress Reports will be final reports under the current iteration of the Regional Action Plan for Jobs, closing out the narratives on Actions for the 2015 – 2017.

Building on the momentum of the 2015-2017 Plans, my focus, and that of my Department will now turn to the refresh and refocus of the Regional Action Plan for Jobs through to 2020 which will place an emphasis on delivering to a smaller number of key strategic objectives in support of enterprise and job creation in every region. The refreshed Plans will capitalize on the added value that comes from collaborative action where for example there is: a particular (sectoral) opportunity for the region; a barrier to enterprise investment and or entrepreneurial activity; and/or a regional vulnerability that needs to be responded to.

In the second Progress Reports, on actions up to the end of 2016, the following was recorded for each Region:

South-West:

248 of the South West Action Plan’s 261 actions were due to be initiated or completed by the end of 2016. 237 of these were on track to be delivered, or had been completed. 4 actions were delayed; 7 actions were no longer being progressed or had been deemed unfeasible. This represented an overall implementation rate of 95%.

West:

179 of the West Action Plan’s 194 actions were due to be initiated or completed by the end of 2016. 175 of these were on track to be delivered, or had been completed. 4 actions were delayed; 2 actions were no longer being progressed, or had been deemed unfeasible. This represented an overall implementation rate of 97%.

South-East:

165 of the South-East Action Plan’s 190 actions were due to be initiated or completed by the end of 2016. 162 of these are on track to be delivered, or had been completed and 3 actions were delayed or no longer being progressed. This represented an overall implementation rate of 98%.

Midlands:

By the second half of 2016, 92 of the Midland Action Plan's 121 actions were due to be initiated or completed. Some 84 of these were on track to be delivered, or had been completed. 4 actions were delayed while another 4 were no longer being progressed or had been deemed unfeasible. This represented an overall completion/ implementation rate of 96.5%.

Mid-East:

136 of the Mid East Action Plan's 163 actions were due to be initiated or completed by the end of 2016. 127 of these were on track to be delivered, or had been completed. 4 actions were delayed; 5 actions were no longer being progressed, or had been deemed unfeasible. This represented an overall implementation rate of 93%.

Dublin:

By the end of 2016, out of the 100 actions, 76 were ongoing, 18 were complete and 6 were delayed. This represented an overall implementation rate of 94%.

Mid-West:

120 of the Mid West Action Plan's 159 actions were due to be initiated or completed by the end of 2016. 114 of these were on track to be delivered, or had been completed. 2 actions were delayed; 2 had been merged with others due to similarity of objectives; and 2 actions were no longer being progressed, or had been deemed unfeasible. This represented an overall implementation rate of 95%.

North-East/North-West:

By the end of 2016, 117 of the North East/North West Regions Action Plan's 153 actions were due to be initiated or completed by the Departments and Agencies. Some 113 of these were on track to be delivered, or had been completed. Only 1 action was delayed while 3 were no longer being progressed. This represents an overall implementation rate (i.e. actions already complete or on track for completion) of 96.5%.

Monitoring implementation and publication of progress reports will continue under the refreshed Regional Plans.

Question No. 16 answered with Question No. 13.

Trade Sanctions

17. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if her Department has assessed the impact that United States sanctions on Iran will have on multinational and indigenous companies here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22756/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): Ireland shares the views expressed by the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Fredrica Mogherini, to the effect that the EU deeply regrets the announcement by the US that it will withdraw from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) which was signed by the "E3+3" Group with Iran. The EU remains committed to the continued full and effective implementation of the JCPOA. The lifting of sanctions against Iran under the JCPOA has led to a positive impact on trade and economic relations with Iran, and its commitment to ensuring that this can continue to be delivered in the interests of improved geo-political stability.

From a trade perspective, Iran, with a population of 80 million, and a relatively wealthy middle class, is a potential growth market worthy of further exploration for Irish exporters. However, I agree that the recent announcements by the US Administration are likely to have a negative effect on this growth potential, in particular if the US imposes sanctions on European companies that do business in Iran following their withdrawal from the Agreement.

According to CSO figures, Irish goods exports to Iran nearly doubled from €72 million in 2016 to €143 million in 2017, primarily due to an increase of €67m in the General Industrial Machinery category. However exports to Iran are a very small proportion of Ireland's total global goods exports - amounting to only 0.1% of Ireland's total goods exports in 2017.

Goods imports from Iran to Ireland increased from €1.6 million in 2016 to €3.5 million in 2017. According to the CSO, there is no services trade with Iran.

According to CSO data, there is no Iranian foreign direct investment into Ireland. There are no Iranian companies in the IDA portfolio at present. IDA Ireland is maintaining constant contact with their client base in relation to any potential impacts the sanctions may have and the Agency will continue to monitor the situation closely.

Despite the alleviation of sanctions under the JCPOA, there remain practical difficulties for Irish businesses seeking to do business in Iran. The continuance of some US financial sanctions has meant that European banks - including Irish institutions - have been cautious with regard to engaging in financial transactions with Iran. In addition, Iran is often not included as a covered geographical territory for travel insurance and/or other types of business insurance, where the insurance company is from the US, or has a US mother company, and travelling to Iran negates the visa waiver for Irish passport holders travelling to the US.

Despite these difficulties, Enterprise Ireland has supported the efforts of Irish companies wishing to trade with Iran, while highlighting the practical difficulties of doing business there. EI has previously brought trade delegations to Iran, and also held a 'Doing Business with Iran' Event in Dublin in July 2017, which 35 EI clients attended. EI has also secured the services of an in-country Iranian market expert/pathfinder, to provide advice and assist EI clients WHO may encounter difficulties due to the re-imposition of sanctions or the threat of same.

As regards client companies of EI, the precise consequences arising from the very recent announcement by the US Administration of its withdrawal from the JCPOA are still being analysed and EI, together with my Department, will keep the impacts on those companies under review.

EU Meetings

18. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if she will report on the recent meeting of the Digital 9 EU conference; the key issues discussed at the meeting and the way in which Ireland compares with the other members of the D9 in terms of the digital economy; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22852/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): As Minister of State responsible for Trade, Employment, Business, EU Digital Single Market and Data Protection, I hosted a Ministerial meeting of the EU Digital 9+ (D9+) front-runner countries, which is a loose affiliation of like-minded Member States on Digital Single Market issues, on 15 May. The meeting further underscored Ireland's commitment to the digital agenda and increased the visibility of Ireland as a digital front runner in Europe.

The meeting focused on Artificial Intelligence and built on recent EU developments in this field. On 10 April last, I signed an EU political Declaration on Artificial Intelligence, which set out areas where agreement was reached by Member States for future cooperation. The European Commission has since followed up with a Communication on Artificial Intelligence, proposing a three-pronged approach to increase public and private investment in AI, prepare for socio-economic changes, and ensure an appropriate ethical and legal framework. The D9+ meeting, which featured all eleven members of the group, will help to progress the development of policy in this emerging area.

Ireland is a digital frontrunner because of its prominent ranking in the EU Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) Report. The European Commission published the 2018 DESI Report last Friday, which revealed that Ireland has moved up three places – to 6th from 9th – compared to 2017. This reflects improvements in basic and advanced digital skills; online transactions; and Irish people's use of internet services.

Economic Competitiveness

19. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the way in which she plans to assist businesses with challenges such as escalating insurance costs and commercial rates; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22844/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): Addressing Ireland's cost competitiveness remains a key economic priority for Government which continues to monitor Ireland's cost competitiveness on a regular basis.

The National Competitiveness Council monitors business cost competitiveness annually and its research findings indicate that Ireland's cost base has improved across a range of metrics over the last five years (e.g. the cost of starting a business, communications costs, electricity prices and labour costs growth). This has made Irish firms more competitive internationally and made Ireland a more attractive location for firms to base their operations in. Despite improvements in Irish cost competitiveness, the openness of the economy means that the enterprise sector is particularly vulnerable to negative price and cost shocks which are outside the influence of domestic policymakers. Brexit also brings into sharp focus the importance of our cost competitiveness.

Government is committed to take action to address unnecessarily high costs (i.e. cost and price levels not justified by productivity) wherever they arise. A range of initiatives set out in the Action Plan for Jobs are in train across Government Departments to improve the ease of doing business, reduce the administrative burden, enhance our cost competitiveness and productivity, and drive greater efficiencies across the enterprise base.

The National Competitiveness Council and my Department and its agencies are continually engaged with relevant stakeholders on the particular policy needs required to support cost competitiveness. These stakeholders include other Government Departments, regulatory bodies, other public bodies and the private sector. In this regard, there is a role for both the public and private sectors alike to proactively manage the controllable portion of their respective cost bases, drive efficiency and continue to take action to address unnecessarily high costs. Such actions will ensure that improvements in relative cost competitiveness are more sustainable, leaving Ireland better positioned to cope with external shocks.

The Government recognises that rising insurance costs for enterprise are an issue. For this reason, the Minister for Finance established the Cost of Insurance Working Group in July 2016.

In terms of my own Department's work, in December 2017, we published the First Report of the Personal Injuries Commission, which was established on foot of a recommendation from this Cost of Insurance Working Group. Implementation of the actions in the Report of the Personal Injuries Commission will help to bring more consistency to medical reporting and diagnosis of personal injuries, leading to a better functioning personal injuries environment in the future.

The ongoing work of the Personal Injuries Commission, the implementation of the Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance and the complementary work of the Cost of Insurance Working Group should contribute to a better functioning personal injury litigation system and should also help to deliver reduced premiums for businesses.

In terms of commercial rates, the levying and collection of rates is a matter for each individual local authority. The Department of Housing and Planning has developed legislative proposals to modernise and consolidate the legislation governing commercial rates. Among the measures included in the General Scheme of the Bill are provisions to allow a local authority to introduce rates alleviation schemes to support the implementation of policy objectives, including in: local economic and community plans; Development Plans and Local Area Plans; and national planning policies.

The Government approved the drafting of a Rates Bill. The General Scheme of the Bill is currently with the Attorney General's office for drafting, with a view to its introduction as soon as possible.

Research and Development Data

20. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her views on whether the Innovation 2020 research and development intensity target of 2.5% of GNP will be attained; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22859/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy John Halligan): In 2011 and as part of the Europe 2020 Strategy to support growth that is smart, sustainable and inclusive, the Government committed to raise gross investment in Research and Development to 2.5% of GNP by 2020. This commitment was reiterated in Innovation 2020 in 2015.

Expenditure on Innovation, Research and Development consists of both public and private expenditure. Gross investment in R and D has since risen to €3.2 billion in 2016. This is an increase of over half a billion euro since 2011. The estimated expenditure on R and D by Government Departments in 2017 is €768 million. This represents an increase of almost €40 million over 2016 and is the highest level of public expenditure on R&D since 2012.

A very significant part of our innovation policy has been to align public investment efforts in a manner that leverages R and D activity in the enterprise sectors. While private spending on R and D slowed during the financial crisis, it has been increasing steadily since 2011. Business Expenditure on R and D rose to €2.3 billion in 2016 from €1.7 billion in 2011, an increase of over 35%.

Despite the fact that overall expenditure in R and D has increased every year since committing to Europe 2020 targets, reaching the 2.5% of GNP intensity rate target presents a very significant challenge. In 2016 our GNP intensity level stood at 1.43%, down from 1.91% in 2012. Even when using GNI* as a complementary indicator (GNI* removes globalisation impacts on the Irish economy), the R and D intensity rate is estimated at 1.72% for 2016.

This is in part due to the strength of our economic performance and subsequent increases in GNP growth rates year on year over the last number of years. Our challenge is to increase the level of investment in R and D to keep pace with GNP growth rates, in the context of significant demands on the public purse.

Notwithstanding the level of the R and D intensity rate, I am pleased to note that Ireland performs well in international comparison tables. European Commission analysis shows that, in aggregate terms, Ireland is one of the best innovation output performers, making it one of the most efficient performers overall in terms of outputs relative to investment.

My Department is commencing an interim review of Innovation 2020 this year and this will give us the opportunity to take stock of what has been achieved under Innovation 2020 since December 2015 and will inform the development of its successor.

Small and Medium Enterprises Supports

21. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her views on the business survey results (details supplied) carried out recently; her plans for greater diversified funding for small businesses in County Donegal and rural Ireland; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [19108/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department, and other Government agencies operate a number of programmes and schemes to assist the start-up and expansion of small businesses. My priority as Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation is to drive the creation of high-quality and sustainable jobs around all the regions and counties of Ireland, including Donegal.

The Local Enterprise Office (LEO) in Donegal is the first-stop-shop for providing advice and guidance, financial assistance and soft supports such as training and mentoring to anyone wishing to start or grow a business. Funded by my Department, LEO Donegal plays a critical role in supporting microenterprises in the start-up and expansion phases.

The LEO Donegal has invested significantly in micro and small businesses by way of its core suite of supports since its establishment in 2014. Between 2014 and 2017, the LEO Donegal paid out over €1.4 million in grant funding in respect of 121 projects. Clients supported with grant funding have consistently added new jobs with 100 new jobs supported in 2017 and 621 in total over the last 4 years. During this time, over 5,200 participants attended LEO training courses and 132 participants received mentoring. Furthermore, 211 applicants from the county entered the Ireland's Best Young Entrepreneur (IBYE) competition since it was launched in 2014.

As you know, my Department secured an additional €4m capital funding for the 31 LEOs for 2017 to fund a range of LEO Brexit supports across the country, including Donegal. This additional funding has been maintained for 2018. These supports are aimed at strengthening the capacity of micro and small businesses to better cope with the changing external environment, especially the impacts arising from Brexit. The supports include grants to assist LEO clients in diversifying their markets, targeted training and mentoring to address Brexit-related challenges and opportunities, as well as a Lean for Micro programme to help micro-enterprises to address competitive issues within their businesses by building the capability of their employees to identify problems and improve operations.

The LEOs can also assist businesses in accessing other Government supports, for example, business loans from Microfinance Ireland or Trading Online Vouchers for businesses that want

to improve their online sales.

The Regional Action Plan for Jobs, launched in the North East/North West in November 2015, is a central pillar of the Government's ambition to create more jobs in rural areas including Donegal. Under the Plan, the aim is to increase employment in the region by 10-15% over the period to 2020, resulting in the delivery of 28,000 jobs. 12,000 more people are in employment in the Border region from Q1 2015 to Q2 2017 representing good progress towards the target of 28,000 jobs by 2020.

In May 2017, my Department with Enterprise Ireland launched the Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF) with funding of up to €60m designed to support the ambition, goals, and implementation of the Regional Action Plans for Jobs. The first call under this Fund concluded last August, with results announced on 11th December. Three projects across the North East/North West secured funding under the first call including Donegal Digital Innovation which will involve the creation of an innovation ecosystem in Inishowen, by delivering a 3-year enterprise capacity-building programme based on the peninsula's location factors, high tech skillsets and applied research potential in traditional sectors.

The second call for projects under the Regional Fund opened for applications on Monday 16 April.

Finally, my colleague Minister Ring has responsibility for the Action Plan for Rural Development which takes a whole-of-Government approach to the economic and social development of rural Ireland. The Plan contains over 270 actions to be delivered by a range of Government Departments, State agencies and other bodies. The Plan seeks to support sustainable communities, support enterprise and employment, maximise our rural and recreation potential, foster culture and creativity, and improve rural connectivity. A key objective of the Plan is to support sustainable communities through the enhancement of local services, in areas such as rural schools, post offices, and convenience shops.

Proposed Legislation

22. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the status of the introduction of legislation to enhance the powers of the Personal Injuries Assessment Board in view of the recommendation in the cost of motor insurance report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22860/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): On 27 June 2017, the Government gave approval to the drafting of the Personal Injuries Board (Amendment) Bill along the lines of the General Scheme. The purpose of the Bill is to amend the existing legislation to strengthen PIAB in terms of operational issues to ensure greater compliance with the PIAB process and encourage more claims to be settled through the PIAB model.

The General Scheme addresses issues highlighted in submissions made to the public consultation held in 2014, by the then Minister, on the operation of the Personal Injuries Assessment Board Acts 2003 and 2007 in addition to issues highlighted by the Cost of Insurance Working Group Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance published in January 2017 and the Report of the Rising Costs of Motor Insurance published by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach.

The Bill is currently being drafted by the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel. This is a technical and complex piece of legislation and it requires careful consideration during drafting

in conjunction with the Office of the Attorney General. It is hoped to have the drafting of the Bill completed in Q 2 2018 and published thereafter.

Regional Action Plan for Jobs

23. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the progress to date with the Action Plan for Jobs for the north-west region; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [19109/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Since becoming Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, I have made jobs and enterprise in the regions my top priority.

The Regional Action Plan for Jobs initiative is a central pillar of the Government's ambition to create 200,000 new jobs by 2020, 135,000 of which are outside of Dublin. A key objective of each of the 8 regional plans is to have a further 10 to 15 per cent at work in each region by 2020, with the unemployment rate of each region not more than one percentage point greater than the national average.

The North-East/North-West Regional Action Plan for Jobs has been a key policy response for supporting employment growth in the Border region. Local Authorities, enterprise agencies, and other key public and private sector stakeholders across counties Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Cavan, Monaghan and Louth have been strongly involved in, and are key drivers of, the NE/NW Action Plan.

The core objective of the NE/NW Action Plan is to have a further 28,000 at work in the region by 2020. In terms of impact, 12,000 more people are in employment in the Border region from Q1 2015 (baseline year) to Q2 2017, representing good progress towards the target of 28,000 jobs by 2020 as set out in the Regional Action Plan.

Achievements in the North West under the Action Plan since 2015 include the establishment of a new precision engineering and manufacturing Technology Gateway at IT Sligo; the award of INTERREG funding to the North West Greenways Network, and the selection of 12 participants from the North West for Enterprise Ireland's New Frontiers programme in 2017. At the end of 2016, as reported in the Second Progress Report, more than 90 percent of the actions in the North East/North West Action Plan were either on track for completion or complete. The third and fourth (final) progress reports are being finalized currently.

In December last year I announced €30.5 million in funding to support enterprise capability in the regions, with 21 projects from all over the country receiving funding. This Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF) totalling €60 million is being rolled out by Enterprise Ireland over the next 4 years to support collaborative and innovative projects that can sustain and add to employment at a national, regional and county level. On Monday 16th April, last I launched the second Call under the fund, making available the remainder of the €60 million.

Two of the successful projects involved participants from the North West region under Call 1 of the Fund: a network of three Digital and Innovation Hubs (which included one in Co. Leitrim); and a new Digital Innovation Hub and enterprise capacity building programme in Co. Donegal.

The enterprise agencies continue their work to contribute towards the ambitious targets set out in the Regional Action Plan. Enterprise Ireland recently announced a 4% employment growth in its client companies for the Border region, which now employ almost 11,500 people.

On the FDI front, the number of IDA-backed jobs grew by 4% as a whole last year, with almost 12,500 people now employed in IDA companies in the Border region.

Through partnership between Enterprise Ireland and the Local Authorities, the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) have supported 586 companies in the North West with 2,616 employees and last year LEO client companies in the North West added 190 new employees in total.

Building on the progress and momentum of collaboration achieved to date through the Regional Action Plans 2015-2017 is my priority. On Monday, the 16th April last I met with the Chairs of the Regional APJ committees and other regional stakeholders, and together we have started a process to refresh and refocus all the Regional Plans to ensure their relevance and impact out to 2020. I look forward to working further with the regional stakeholders in the North-West to ensure we deliver to the employment targets for 2020 set out under the Regional Plans.

Question No. 24 answered with Question No. 13.

Employment Rights

25. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if her Department will examine the ongoing failure by NERA and WRC management to secure compensation for underpayments in the social care sector; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22885/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): The Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) is responsible for ensuring compliance with employment rights legislation, including the national minimum wage in all sectors of employment. As the deputy will be aware, WRC inspectors, formerly NERA inspectors, routinely carry out inspections in all employment sectors, including in the social care sector, with a view to checking for and enforcing employment rights compliance by employers.

In the first instance, the WRC aims to achieve voluntary compliance with employment law through the provision of education and awareness, inspection of employers' employment records and, enforcement where necessary. If voluntary compliance cannot be achieved and employers either refuse or fail to rectify the breaches identified and/or pay money due to their employees, these cases are referred for further prosecution.

The social care sector in Ireland comprises both public and private employers and in the period 2014 to 2017 the WRC Inspection Service has carried out inspections on an average of 80 premises per year in the Health and Child Care Sectors. As a result of this activity, €450,000 in unpaid wages has been recovered for workers in the sector in that period.

In 2017 alone, inspections led to more that €200,000 in unpaid wages being recovered across the health, nursing and childcare sector. I understand that the WRC plans to maintain this level of activity in the sector for this year.

I am confident that the resources of the WRC and the significant powers of the inspectors are sufficient to ensure that the rights of workers in the social care sector are enforced.

Foreign Direct Investment

26. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans for the site in Athenry, County Galway, for future foreign direct investment in view

of the fact that a company (details supplied) will not proceed with a data centre investment. [22881/18]

37. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the immediate steps being taken to reverse the reputational damage done to Ireland's image as a location for future foreign direct investment for data centre projects in view of the confirmation that a company (details supplied) will not proceed with a data centre investment in Athenry County Galway; [22858/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 26 and 37 together.

I very much regret that Apple will not be proceeding with its plans to construct a data centre in Athenry, especially as the project would have been a source of significant investment and job creation for Galway and the West of Ireland.

As with all of its clients, the IDA works with Apple to support job creation and investment in Ireland. Given the size of the investment involved, and the subsequent issues encountered by the company throughout the planning process, IDA Ireland was in regular contact with its management throughout this time. The Agency, however, had no role in the independent planning process and court challenges in respect of it. As far as I am aware, Apple currently has not made any decisions in relation to the future of the site.

I want to emphasise that the Government, together with IDA Ireland, did everything it could to support this investment. This included high-level engagement with the company, both at home and abroad. The Taoiseach, for example, met with the firm's senior management in the USA in November 2017, where he made it clear that the project had the support of our Government and the local community in Athenry.

Ultimately, in spite of these efforts, Apple has taken a commercial decision not to proceed, making it clear that the delays that beset this project caused them to reconsider their plans. As I have made clear, these delays have underlined our need to make the State's planning and legal processes more efficient. The Government has therefore already been working, over the last number of months, to make improvements to those processes. This will ensure that we are better placed to take advantage of future investment opportunities, whether from data centre providers or other sectors.

The Government has, for example, published legislative proposals to designate data centres as "strategic infrastructure" for planning purposes. This will ensure that future data centre-related planning applications can move more swiftly through the planning process. I am hopeful that these legislative changes can be enacted by the end of the current Dáil session.

The Government also agreed, in October 2017, to the implementation of a strengthened policy framework to support the continued development of data centres. This framework includes a number of actions which, once fully implemented, will help Ireland attract and sustain such investments in the future.

Part of this work is the development of a National Policy Statement on the role of data centres in Ireland's overall enterprise strategy. This will set out their potential in the context of Ireland's economic development, especially in regional locations, whilst taking account of wider challenges in energy and renewable energy policy. The importance of data centres to Ireland is recognised as well in Project Ireland 2040, which makes clear that the promotion of Ireland as a sustainable international destination for information and communications technology infrastructure is a key national objective.

The IDA, meanwhile, is already working hard to win new data centre investments for Ireland. Despite the disappointing decision made by Apple, Ireland is still a highly attractive destination for data centre projects. There are nearly 30 major data centres located here that are operated by some of the world's leading technology companies and I am confident that this number will increase in the future. Ireland's strengths for this type of investment, including our climate, energy supply and business environment, remain well-known to other potential investors.

Work Permits Data

27. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her views on recent changes she made to employment permits for workers from outside the European Economic Area; and her further views on the way in which this will impact on employment here. [22890/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): On Monday 14th May, I announced a pilot, quota based system that will address the immediate needs of the Horticulture, Dairy and Meat Processing Sectors and is a first step in addressing some of the challenges facing the sector. The scheme will allow workers in the horticulture, meat processing and dairy sectors from non-EEA countries to access the labour market.

As the economy improves and we approach full employment, labour shortages at the lower skills end of the jobs market are becoming apparent in some sectors, with the consequent potential to constrict growth if these needs are not met.

Earlier this year, in recognition of the changed economy and labour market of today as we move clearly and strongly out of the downturn, I asked my Department to review the economic migration policies underpinning the current employment permits system. The purpose of the review is to ensure that our current policies are fully supportive of Ireland's emerging labour market needs, be they critical skills needs or lower-skilled labour shortages. The review is overseen by an Interdepartmental Group, chaired by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation. A Report is due to for my consideration by the end of June 2018.

However, I am acutely aware of the particular challenges facing parts of the agri-food sector. The sector employs about 173,000 people across the regions, contributes almost 8% to gross national income, and currently has exports worth almost €13.5bn. It is our most important indigenous sector and its reach into rural Ireland brings jobs and value to every region. For this reason, I asked the review group in advance of completing the full review, to prioritise the emerging labour shortages in the sector in its deliberations.

I am applying a quota of 500 permits for horticulture workers, 250 for meat processing operatives and 50 for dairy farm assistants. This is to ensure that in the longer-term, strategies are put in place to source labour supply from both the domestic and European labour markets and to invest in innovative technologies for the sector. A new minimum remuneration threshold of €22,000 is being introduced for these occupations. Furthermore, there will be specific obligations on the employers around the welfare and prospects of the foreign nationals employed. This includes ensuring they have access to suitable accommodation and to training in areas such as language skills.

This is a departure from our current employment permits regime, which has generally focused on critical skills gaps at the higher end of the labour market as we position Ireland for further growth in the knowledge economy. Like many developed countries, however, we are now seeing pressures at the lower-skilled end of the market. In seeking to deal with these pressures,

I am also conscious that any changes introduced must not disrupt the domestic labour market.

Employment permit policy is part of the response to addressing skills deficits which exist and are likely to continue into the medium term, but it is not intended over the longer term to act as a substitute for meeting the challenge of up-skilling the State's resident workforce, with an emphasis on the process of lifelong learning, and on maximizing the potential of EEA nationals to fill our skills deficits.

The report of the Inter-Departmental review group, due this summer, is tasked with recommending a strategy for economic migration to meet the State's changing labour needs into the future.

Action Plan for Jobs

28. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the key measures in the Action Plan for Jobs 2018 for persons with disabilities. [22873/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): The Action Plan for Jobs is one of the Government's key instruments to support job creation. The Action Plan for Jobs process has worked well to achieve its primary objective. Since the first Plan was launched in early 2012, there are over 345,000 more people at work. The unemployment rate has fallen from a high of 16 per cent to 5.9 per cent in April 2018. A continuing focus of the Action Plan for Jobs is that the regions benefit from employment growth so that all regions have an unemployment rate of no more than one percentage point of the national average.

The four key aims of Action Plan for Jobs 2018 are that:

- Ireland's enterprise base remains successful amid the uncertainty created by Brexit;
- all parts of the country achieve their potential in terms of job creation;
- those entering, re-entering, or in the workforce have the incentives and skills needed to prosper; and
- Ireland's enterprise base remains successful by focusing relentlessly on competitiveness, productivity, and innovation.

With Action Plan for Jobs 2018, the Government demonstrates its commitment to support the long-term growth of our enterprise sector. Action Plan for Jobs 2018 reflects the Enterprise 2025 Renewed priorities and also the priorities within other Government strategies that are relevant to job creation, including for people with disabilities, e.g. Pathways to Work Strategy and the Action Plan for Education. Pathways to Work is the main Government initiative encouraging access to the labour market and ultimately participation in employment. It is complemented by the Action Plan for Jobless Households, the National Disability Inclusion Strategy, and the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities.

Under Action Plan for Jobs 2018, there is a focus on increasing participation in the labour market, including assisting access to work for those who wish to do so, by ensuring they have opportunity to address real or perceived skills deficiencies, whether they are discouraged workers or people with disabilities.

Specific measures in Action Plan for Jobs 2018 include implementing the Pathways to Work

Strategy, increasing awareness among employers of the range of services and supports available to maximise take up, and improving information flow on welfare-to-work schemes, targeting employers and inactive people.

There is also a specific action to increase the focus of activation efforts on groups outside the labour force, by:

- reviewing the range of income supports (including in-work supports) for people with disabilities to ensure payments are aligned between schemes and, if appropriate, amend the payment structure to ensure that it supports a return to work for people who wish to do so;

- expanding the use of Intreo Centres as a gateway to engage with people with disabilities and increase the number of Intreo staff trained in the provision of employment supports to people with disability; and

- developing online ready-reckoner tools for people on disability payments to assess the net benefits of returning to work.

Brexit Supports

29. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if she will report on the uptake of the Brexit loan scheme for Irish businesses in the first two weeks since its launch on 28 March 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22637/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Brexit Loan Scheme provides affordable working capital to eligible businesses with up to 499 employees that are or will be Brexit impacted and meet the scheme criteria. The €23 million exchequer funding (€14 million from my Department and €9 million from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine) has been leveraged to provide a fund of up to €300 million.

The scheme features a two-stage application process. First, businesses must apply to the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) to confirm their eligibility for the scheme. This application process requires businesses to use guidelines provided on the SBCI website to determine if they are eligible, and if so, to complete the eligibility form. As part of the process, businesses must submit a business plan, demonstrating the means by which they intend to innovate, change or adapt to meet the challenges posed by Brexit. The SBCI assess the applications and successful applicants receive an eligibility reference number.

Successful applicants can then apply for a loan under the scheme with one of the participating finance providers. Participating finance providers are the Bank of Ireland and Ulster Bank with Allied Irish Bank following in June. Approval of loans are subject to the finance providers own credit policies and procedures.

The scheme was launched on 28 March this year. Metrics detailing the uptake of the scheme will be available at the end of Quarter 2, 2018.

Brexit Issues

30. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to minimise the impact of Brexit in County Donegal; the engagement she has had with the IDA to ensure it secures new investment in the county in view of Brexit; and if she will

make a statement on the matter. [22627/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I fully appreciate the importance of ensuring that Irish businesses, including those located in Donegal, are best able to withstand the pressures that Brexit may exert. That is why additional financial resources have been secured to support the strategic response to Brexit by our enterprise agencies, including IDA Ireland.

Brexit, or more particularly the response to the challenges it presents, is a key factor in shaping IDA Ireland's strategy and operations. This includes the Agency's approach to regional development, finance, planning, marketing and promotional activities. The IDA has established a specific Brexit Committee to oversee its response to the opportunities and challenges arising from the UK's exit from the EU. The Agency also has a clear Brexit Plan, which includes one-to-one investor engagements and public relations and media campaigns.

I am very much conscious of the particular trade implications that Brexit may have for border counties, such as Donegal, where 12 IDA Ireland client companies are based. These companies employ 3,389 people in the County. I am pleased that the level of employment by multinationals in the County has increased by 52% since 2012 and we are committed - notwithstanding the challenges associated with Brexit - to increasing these numbers even further.

Employment growth in Donegal is not, of course, driven by overseas companies alone. Enterprise Ireland has also grown its jobs numbers in the County, with its client companies increasing employment by over 100 positions in 2017. Both Enterprise Ireland and the IDA maintain constant engagement with their clients in Donegal to encourage them to grow jobs and investments in the County even further. The Agencies also work together, wherever possible, to spur employment creation. The Local Enterprise Offices, as well as InterTrade Ireland, are also working hard to ensure sustainable job growth for County Donegal and for the wider North-West Region.

Economic Competitiveness

31. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the steps being taken to reverse competitiveness deficiencies and to make Dublin an attractive location for businesses to locate in; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22883/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Despite intense competition, Ireland's competitiveness performance remains positive. Ireland moved from 16th in 2015 to 6th in 2017 in the Institute for Management Development's World Competitiveness Yearbook. In addition, the World Bank's most recent "Doing Business 2018" report shows Ireland is now ranked 17th out of 190 countries, an improvement of one place on last year.

However, there is no room for complacency. Ireland's Competitiveness Challenge 2017 Report, published by the National Competitiveness Council in December last year, outlines the main challenges to Ireland's competitiveness and the policy responses required to meet them. Although national in scope, many of the recommendations apply to Dublin. My officials and I remain focused on competitiveness - an agenda that requires continued cross Government commitment and a focus on the implementation of actions to enhance it.

As Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, my objective is to create the best possible environment for enterprise, entrepreneurship, innovation and investment across all regions, including Dublin. The immediate challenge for Ireland is to ensure growth is sustain-

able, that enterprises are resilient and we continue to grow Irish enterprises and attract foreign direct investment. We are continually examining how we can improve on factors that are crucial to fostering further investment here, including our cost base, infrastructure, the availability of talent and innovation.

Enterprise 2025 Renewed - which I launched recently - placed an increased emphasis on developing our Irish-owned enterprises. There is a strong focus on taking action that will embed resilience in our enterprise base. We are placing a spotlight on innovation and on skills. Enterprise Ireland places a strong emphasis on competitiveness. It supports exporting enterprises with initiatives in Lean, Research, Development and Innovation, and management development. The Agency helps enterprises to take a strategic approach to understanding and responding to potential implications arising from Brexit and assists them to enter into new markets and diversify their export base. The Local Enterprise Offices offer a suite of supports to enhance the competitiveness of small and micro enterprises.

Quality and affordability of life is particularly important in ensuring Ireland is an attractive location for talent and investment. Ireland, and particularly Dublin, relative to many EU cities, is an expensive place to live in terms of residential property costs. The Government is acutely aware that ultimately, additional housing supply is required to address house price and rent pressures. The 'Rebuilding Ireland' Plan presents a wide-ranging set of commitments to address housing supply, and while many of these will take time, the Government is implementing and driving change. In 2017, over 17,500 new homes commenced construction.

Recognising that Dublin's continued performance is critical to Ireland's overall competitiveness, some of the key measures outlined in the National Planning Framework, such as delivering the key rail projects set out in the Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area, improving access to Dublin Airport and facilitating the growth of Dublin Port, are also focused on supporting the future growth and success of Dublin as Ireland's leading global city of scale.

Competition and Consumer Protection Commission Reports

32. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation when the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission will report on the operation of the household waste collection market; her plans to publish the report; if publication can be brought forward as soon as possible; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22849/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Policy responsibility for the waste sector lies with the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment. On 4 July 2017, a motion was passed by Dáil Éireann which called on the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment to ask the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) to report on the operation of the household waste collection market.

Following a formal request on 25 September from the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, the then Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, in accordance with section 10(4) of the Competition and Consumer Protection Act 2014, requested the CCPC to carry out a study on the operation of the household waste collection market.

The study will assess the household waste collection market and make recommendations, as appropriate. It will assess the nature and scale of consumer and operator issues in the household waste collection market and consider if the introduction of an enhanced regulatory regime could efficiently address these issues, in the short and long term. It will include the following

elements:

1. Research on current issues in the waste sector.
2. An economic assessment of the household waste collection market.
3. An overview of waste collection in other countries.

I understand that the study is well advanced and that to date the CCPC has carried out an extensive series of interviews and meetings with approximately 20 key stakeholders in the waste market including those with a policy/enforcement role, consumer representative groups, academics, industry representative groups and individual household waste collection operators. The CCPC has also commissioned:

- consumer market research;
- engaged with other EU national competition agencies on how waste markets operate in their jurisdictions;
- sought extensive information from over 40 operators and commissioned an external econometric analysis of the data received; and
- conducted a public consultation exercise.

I understand that the CCPC anticipates that its report will be finalised over the summer. The issue of publication will be considered at that stage.

Gender Balance

33. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the progress in achieving more gender balance in funded research under Science Foundation Ireland’s Agenda 2020 strategy; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22623/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy John Halligan): In 2016, Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) published its Gender Strategy for the years 2016-2020. This strategy provides a comprehensive framework for delivering SFI’s actions to retain and increase the participation of excellent female researchers in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) careers. Since the launch, SFI has moved towards streamlining gender initiatives across all its programmes, with the overarching aim of redressing the gender imbalance amongst SFI award holders.

SFI’s Gender Strategy sets out the agency’s roadmap to improve the representation and progression of women in all aspects of STEM careers in Ireland:

- Strand 1 of the strategy focuses on gender equality across SFI education and public engagement initiatives, with the aim of increasing the participation and interest of girls in STEM-related activities.
- Strand 2 targets female representation within the SFI funded portfolio and SFI review panels. Concrete measures to achieve these targets are outlined.
- Strand 3 will ensure that gender perspectives are integrated into the research content of SFI funded research programmes.

In 2017, SFI achieved its Agenda 2020 target of making 25% of its awards to female re-

searchers and this target has now been revised upward to 30%. This target has been aided by SFI providing incentives for research bodies to submit applications from female researchers to various programmes, with a focus on those aligned with early career stage.

The SFI Research Outputs Census 2017 shows that the percentage of female SFI Award Holders Active in 2017 was 28%, up on 25% in 2016 and 21% in 2015. The percentage of female team members (those employed on SFI awards) was 37%, an increase on 35% in 2016, which represents progress towards redressing gender imbalance.

Furthermore, award holders' success rates (2016) shows that female researchers are as competitive as their male counterparts in terms of their SFI funding success rate i.e., 32% across all programmes. However, female researchers within the same cohort (2016) accounted for only 25% of SFI funding applications received.

SFI is also supportive of the Athena SWAN Charter which is the internationally recognised 'quality mark' for gender equality. It was established to encourage and recognise commitment to advancing the careers of women in science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medicine.

Science Foundation Ireland continues to implement specific grant management policies to deal with the needs of female researchers during periods of maternity and adoptive leave, and will continue to innovate in this regard. The policies being developed and associated outcomes will complement and support the Athena SWAN initiative, whereby the Irish Research Council, Science Foundation Ireland and the Health Research Board will require research bodies to have attained a bronze institutional Athena SWAN award by the end of 2019 and a silver institutional Athena SWAN by the end of 2023, to be eligible for research funding.

Another aspect of Science Foundation Ireland's Gender Strategy is to ensure that gender is integrated as a perspective in all the research Science Foundation Ireland funds, when this is relevant. While this approach was launched for some programmes during 2017, applicants will in future be required to provide a statement articulating the sex/gender variables in their research and will include guidance for applicants and a request for comment from the reviewers.

Finally, further rollout of gender redressing initiatives amongst SFI award holders will include those to address gender imbalance in senior academic roles. Specifically, in order to encourage more applications from excellent female researchers to the SFI Research Professorship Programme, SFI is mandating that for all institutions wishing to nominate candidates to the programme, one of the next two successful Expressions of Interest (i.e. approved by SFI) must be associated with a female candidate, which must then be followed up with the submission of a Full Proposal.

The above detail shows that SFI is proactive in bringing about a sea change on gender equality matters in the field of research and development and I am confident that the initiatives employed by SFI to date will continue to bring further successes in the future.

Retail Sector

34. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if she has had discussions with the Minister for Finance and-or on a European level on fair taxation of imported goods that are being purchased over the Internet by consumers in direct competition with retailers operating in cities and towns here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22624/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): With the increase in digitisation and internet developments, consumers are enabled to make purchases of goods from across the world that can be delivered to their doorstep. Through initiatives such as on-line vouchers, we encourage Irish based retailers to take advantage of the opportunities presented so that they too can tap into markets further afield.

Concerns have recently been raised relating to taxation of online activities in the Retail Consultation Forum chaired by Minister Breen. Whilst I have not engaged directly with the Minister for Finance or on a European level on this topic, I have been advised that proposals for Modernising VAT on e-Commerce were adopted in December 2017. These proposals should go some way to addressing issues raised by changing the method of charging VAT on business-to-consumer cross border supplies.

These proposals aim to:

- address the imbalance whereby lower value goods that are being imported into the EU are exempt from VAT.

In addition, the proposals will make large online marketplaces responsible for:

- ensuring VAT is collected on sales on their platforms that are made by companies in non-EU countries to EU consumers.

These changes will come into force in 2021.

International Bodies Membership

35. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if funding will be provided for Ireland to join CERN in order that significant commercial and research benefits can be obtained from membership of the organisation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22851/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy John Halligan): Innovation 2020, the national strategy for research and innovation, recognises that in order for Ireland to become a Global Innovation Leader, our research and innovation system must be open with strong international collaboration links. Membership of leading International Research Organisations is an important mechanism for facilitating this engagement.

For this reason, the Government gave a commitment in Innovation 2020 to examine Ireland's membership options with a number of International Research Organisations including CERN and also the European Southern Observatory (ESO), ELIXIR and LOFAR.

Ireland joined ELIXIR, the life sciences data infrastructure organisation in 2016 and in 2017 my department funded Ireland's membership of the International LOFAR Radio Telescope. As announced in October 2017, Ireland is expected to join ESO later in 2018.

CERN is a leading global scientific collaboration investigating the fundamental composition of matter. It was established in 1952 and currently has 21 member states and co-operation agreements with approximately 40 other states. My Department has been assessing the case for membership of CERN.

Regrettably, in view of the intense demands on the capital programme and the tight fiscal constraints it will not be possible to progress membership of both CERN and the European Southern Observatory in 2018. As mentioned, Ireland will join ESO later this year and a capital

allocation has been obtained specifically to ensure Ireland's membership. This will cost €0.75 million in 2018 and increase to approximately €3.5 million in 2019.

This decision to proceed to join ESO first reflects an assessment of the costs and benefits of each membership. ESO has been prioritised over CERN because of the large, established community of astronomy researchers in Ireland. Astronomy is an active area of research in each of our universities and several of our institutes of technology.

This community is well positioned to avail of the opportunities provided by ESO membership, thereby maximising the immediate benefit to Ireland.

These opportunities include participation in pioneering frontier research, access to cutting-edge technology, commercial opportunities for enterprise, the creation of human capital and skills and the further promotion of STEM subjects in Ireland.

In addition, the companies in Ireland that have had great success in securing contracts from the European Space Agency are well placed to bid for ESO contracts due to the overlap between the technologies used by ESO and ESA.

I fully recognise the value of membership of International Research Organisations (IROs) and my department has an on-going objective to increase Ireland's participation in IROs.

We will keep the issue of CERN membership under review and it is my hope that we may be in a position to progress CERN membership in the future, when the fiscal situation permits.

Question No. 36 answered with Question No. 13.

Question No. 37 answered with Question No. 26.

Exports Data

38. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if she will report on recent CSO trends in goods exports; the key components of goods exports to date in 2018; and the impact Brexit has had on the latest CSO figures. [22889/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): On 16 May 2018 the CSO released the latest data on Goods Exports from Ireland. These show that the value of goods exports rose by 4% in Quarter 1 this year when compared to Q1 in 2017. The value of goods exports in Jan-March 2018 was €33.521 billion compared to a value of €32.141 billion in Jan-March 2017.

The principal categories of goods exports in the Quarter were Medical and Pharmaceutical Products which increased by 18% to €11 billion, Organic Chemicals which increased by 47% to €7 billion and Miscellaneous manufactured articles, which increased by 5% to €1.8 billion when compared with Q1 last year.

While in March 2018 the value of goods exports to the UK fell by 5.7%, for the period Jan-March 2018 there has been a 2% increase in the value of goods exports to the UK.

Overall, in 2017, total exports of goods and services reached a record level of €283 billion, a 9% increase over 2016. Services export values rose by 14%, to their highest level to date of €161 billion and, for a fourth consecutive year the value of goods exports from Ireland rose to reach a new record high of €122 billion.

Goods exports from Ireland globally and to the UK have risen in the first quarter of 2018. The CSO data in itself does not reveal the impact that Brexit may have had on the level of these exports. However, it does provide a valuable indication of trends which will continue to be monitored while the Government intensifies its efforts, domestically and internationally, to support companies with an export focus.

In the 'Building Stronger Business' report, my Department set out a strategy to minimise risks of Brexit and maximise opportunities across four pillars of helping companies to compete, innovate, trade and to negotiate the best outcome for business. It sets out the range of diagnostic, advisory and financial supports that are being made available to companies to help minimise Brexit impacts and target new opportunities.

Dedicated measures were announced in Budget 2018, including a new €300 million Brexit loan scheme for businesses and a €25 million Brexit response loan scheme for the agrifood sector. This is in addition to supports for capital investment in the food industry and Bord Bia marketing and promotion activities, amounting to over €50 million in total. The fund of €116 billion announced in Project 2040 for capital investment over the next decade will also allow the State and its agencies to properly plan major infrastructure projects which can accelerate economic growth and mitigate the impact of Brexit. An Taoiseach's plans for our increased Global Footprint 2025 will further underpin the across-Government efforts to support our globally-trading companies, thereby sustaining jobs, ever mindful of the various challenges to further growth potential, including, of course, Brexit.

National Minimum Wage

39. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the measures taken by her Department to prevent breaches of the National Minimum Wage Act 2000 in the hospitality sector; the further steps she plans to take; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22884/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): The Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) is responsible for ensuring compliance with employment rights legislation generally, including the national minimum wage. Inspectors from the WRC routinely carry out inspections of employer records in all sectors of employment with a view to determining compliance with employment rights legislation. These inspections arise:

- In response to complaints received of alleged non-compliance with relevant employment rights legislation;
- As part of compliance campaigns which focus on compliance in specific sectors or specific pieces of legislation, or
- As routine inspections, which act as a control measure.

The WRC has in place a robust inspection regime to monitor compliance with employment law in all employment sectors, including the hospitality sector. In 2017 alone, over 700 inspections were undertaken in the hospitality sector.

It is also noteworthy that the vast majority of the 2,741 out of hours inspections conducted by WRC inspectors in 2017 were in the hospitality sector. It is my understanding also that the WRC plans to maintain this level of activity in the sector this year.

As a result of the focused inspection approach of the WRC inspectorate, a total of €1,769,484 in unpaid wages was recovered in 2017, of which over €550,000 was accounted for by the hotel and food and drink sectors.

Film Industry Development

40. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the conditions that surrounded the sale of the State's stake in a studio (details supplied); the way in which this fits into the strategy in respect of securing Ireland as an attractive location for film production into the future; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [20006/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Ardmore Studios Limited has been sold to Olcott Entertainment Limited. The Ardmore site is currently zoned for Film Industry use only, and this protection is due to run for at least 5 more years under the Bray Municipal District Local Area plan. The site cannot be used for non-Film Industry development without the agreement of Wicklow County Council to alter the current zoning restriction.

Enterprise Ireland negotiated the sale of its shareholding with the benefit of due diligence undertaken by independent consultants and are satisfied that they realised full market value, and on a par with the other parties.

Investment is required in the Ardmore studio's facilities to secure its long term commercial future and the Olcott Entertainment deal provides the potential to breathe new life into the company at a time when the market for film production in Ireland is again showing good growth potential.

I understand that Olcott plans to develop and expand the Ardmore Studio offering, and other related entertainment projects, and to retain the current experienced Ardmore management and staff.

The promoters of Olcott Entertainment have a strong track record in the film production industry. This acquisition will ensure Ardmore Studios continues to be a world class film studio, can strengthen the potential of Ireland as a location for film production and take advantage of new opportunities in emerging areas including on-demand TV, content and gaming production.

Overall, I am confident that the sale will not only continue to ensure high quality production of current projects, but will also provide continued investment in the studio, and employment opportunities for the skilled workers in the area.

Policy responsibility for the development of the film industry rests with my colleague, Ms Josepha Madigan, TD, Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

The Irish Film Board is the national development agency for the Irish film, TV Drama and the animation industry. Its statutory remit is to assist and encourage the making of film in the State and the development of the industry in Ireland. In 2018, €18 million was allocated to the IFB, an increase of €1.55 million from the previous year.

The Film Board also supports the Irish screen industries at major international markets and festivals, promotes inward investment, the use of Ireland as a location for international production and provides support for companies filming in Ireland. The Board liaises with IDA Ireland and Tourism Ireland to maximise opportunities for the promotion of Ireland as a location for film productions. Information on its funding scheme is available on the Irish Film Board web-

site at www.irishfilmboard.ie.

The Government also supports the film industry through the film tax relief scheme - Section 481 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997. The twin approach of direct funding and tax expenditure measures maximises the benefits of the Government's support to the audiovisual industry.

Industrial Development

41. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of enterprises set up in the past 12 months that are deemed to have a high tech employment requirement; the extent to which Ireland remains an attractive location for such enterprises; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22811/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Advances in technologies are taking place at an unprecedented pace. Technological advances have a pervasive impact across many, if not all, sectors of the economy. In this regard, many sectors of the economy today require technology skills and expertise – demands for high-tech skills are not merely the domain of the ICT sector.

Enterprise 2025 Renewed reaffirms Ireland's ambition to be positioned to the forefront in disruptive technologies, embedding innovation and driving productivity growth. Enterprise 2025 Renewed places a spotlight on talent – ensuring that Ireland continues to perform well internationally in terms of access to the skills required of the 21st Century.

Growth in high tech related employment is buoyant and will likely continue to be so in the coming years. This is being driven by factors such as market demand, technology shifts, the impact of cloud computing, and digital transformation of the economy.

A large number of investments by IDA Ireland client companies into the country require technically proficient staff. For example, new projects announced in 2018 – such as Jaguar Land Rover's planned software engineering centre in Shannon or MSD's planned new biotechnology facility in Dublin – will need highly skilled employees.

Enterprise Ireland supported a total of 181 start ups in 2017 (90 of which are classified as High Potential Start Ups). The medtech, fintech and agtech sectors were well represented, and the majority of start-ups have a strong technological element, data analytics or on-line presence.

Much of the demand for a variety of high tech skills is in established areas such as software development. Enterprises are also making plans, however, to hire more expertise in new technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Data Analytics, Blockchain and Cybersecurity as digital transformation proceeds.

The growth in high technology roles is underpinned by the ICT Skills Action Plan, which is jointly developed and managed by my Department and the Department of Education and Skills. The third iteration of the ICT Action Plan will be published in the coming months, and will build on the success of previous plans with a range of measures aimed at maintaining the momentum in increasing the output of skilled high level ICT professionals from the education and training system, enhancing ICT capacity and awareness, ensuring Ireland maintains a strong ICT talent pool, and that Ireland is promoted as a centre for high level ICT skills.

Ireland remains a favoured destination for investment that requires high-tech employment on account of our highly skilled and flexible workforce. Our education system is also a key factor as it continues to produce the calibre of graduates that foreign and Irish owned companies

seek for their high-tech facilities and investments. Investments in place-making, as envisaged in Project Ireland 2040, to develop places that are attractive to live, work and invest in and offer a quality of life, will continue to play a key role in Ireland's attractiveness for mobile talent.

I am confident, given our strengths and track record as a home to high-tech global companies, that we can expect further such investments in the future. The Government will continue to work hard to ensure that Ireland's offering to such firms remains highly attractive and competitive.

Question No. 42 answered with Question No. 10.

Defence Forces

43. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his views on recent failures related to the payroll system in the Defence Forces leaving members with late payment of wages and late distribution of payslips. [22894/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Since 2017, payrolls for the Defence Forces are processed by the Department's payroll provider, the National Shared Services Office (NSSO). Payments to Defence Forces personnel are made by the NSSO using electronic funds transfer. Also, as part of the move to the NSSO, online payslips were introduced to replace the paper payslips then in use.

My Department has not been made aware of any recent late payments of wages to members of the Defence Forces or late provision of online payslips but if the Deputy can forward any details I will have the matter examined further.

Middle East Issues

44. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the ongoing conflict in the Middle East and particularly the recent killing of Palestinian persons will be raised at the next EU Foreign Affairs Council meeting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23022/18]

45. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the ongoing conflict in the Middle East and particularly the recent killing of Palestinian persons has been raised by Ireland at the United Nations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23023/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 44 and 45 together.

I refer the Deputy to my reply to Question No 31 on 15 May on this topic, and also to my address to a Topical Issues debate on 9 May and my more detailed statement during Statements on Palestine on 15 May, all dealing specifically with this issue.

A central element of my response in those contributions was to call for an independent and transparent investigation of the events in Gaza. At my instruction, Ireland last week co-sponsored a motion at the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva, calling for a Special Session of the Council to discuss these events. At that Special Session on 18 May Ireland supported a resolution which inter-alia provided for the establishment of an independent Commission of Inquiry into what happened and why. Ireland does not currently sit on the Council and so

did not have a vote. The resolution was adopted and the Commission will now be established.

I have also requested that the events in Gaza be discussed at the forthcoming meeting of the EU's Foreign Affairs Council on 28 May.

Tax Reliefs Abolition

46. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to reintroduce a tax relief scheme as part of budget 2019 for trade union subscriptions; if USC and PRSI will be included in this exemption in view of the fact this was not the case during its previous existence from 2001 to 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22947/18]

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

(http://www.budget.gov.ie/Budgets/2017/Documents/Tax_Expenditures_Report%202016_final.pdf)

The review concluded that:

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

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

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

Tax Code

47. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 66 to 70, inclusive, of 16 May 2018, the details of the amendment to the legislation that will be brought forward in the Finance Bill 2018 to impose a calcium threshold on products within the exempt categories; the proposed threshold; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23011/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As indicated previously a small number of exemptions from the sugar-sweetened drinks tax exist for drinks within the CN 2202 category on the basis of the policy rationale for the introduction of the tax.

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. For reasons of clarity amendments will be brought forward in this years Finance Bill to impose a calcium threshold on drinks within some of the exempt CN 2202 headings.

A calcium threshold will be introduced for soya drinks (CN 2202 99 11) and cereal/seed/nut drinks (CN 2202 99 15) and drinks containing milk fats (CN headings 2202 99 91, 2202 99 95 and 2202 99 99). The rationale for exempting these drinks is they are comparable to dairy, some offer an alternative to dairy for persons with dietary requirements such as lactose intolerance, and others contain milk fats which make them closer to dairy than water based beverages.

To ensure consistency, a calcium threshold similar to that contained in dairy will be introduced. Milk contains in the region of 119 milligrams per 100 millilitres of liquid and it is likely that the threshold will place a similar calcium requirement on drinks in the above CN headings in order to be exempt from the tax.

Work is ongoing and these amendments will form part of this year's Finance Bill.

Departmental Legal Costs

48. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Finance the cost to date of legal fees incurred in the case being pursued by the State relating to the decision of the European Commission regarding the alleged grant of state aid to a company (details supplied); the names and amount of fees paid to date to each law firm, senior counsel and barrister; if the barristers are full-time public servants; his views on whether such payments are in breach of the one person, one salary principle; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23020/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Ireland has never accepted the Commission's analysis in the Apple State aid Decision and is challenging the Commission's decision before the European Courts. Notwithstanding this, the Irish authorities have engaged fully with the Commission throughout the State aid investigation. This involved a significant degree of legal and technical complexity, and additional expertise has been engaged where required.

Last week, I confirmed that the first payment, amounting to €1.5bn, has been deposited in the Escrow account. This is the first of a series of payments with the expectation that the remaining tranches will flow into the fund during Q2 and Q3 of 2018, as previously outlined.

Over the past four years approximately €5.8 million (including VAT) has been paid in total, of which approximately €3 million relates to the recovery process. This includes all legal costs, consultancy fees and other associated costs. These fees have been paid by the Department of Finance, Revenue Commissioners, NTMA, Central Bank of Ireland, Attorney General's Office and Chief State Solicitor's Office. As this is an important issue for the State, the case will continue to be resourced as appropriate.

I understand while there are public servants engaged in the case these are salaried employees and not in receipt of fees.

The following table provides details of the legal fees incurred to date, inclusive of VAT.

Advisor	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total
Philip Baker QC		€49,183.43	€151,761.23	€66,525.76	€44,924.80		€312,395.22
Aoife Goodman BL		€23,763.00	€55,052.34	€29,761.08	€92,304.12		€200,880.54
Maurice Collins SC		€25,461.00	€89,184.23	€45,003.73	€91,040.91		€250,689.87
Hogan Lovells		€3,936.00		?			€3,936.00
James Byrne BL				€961.24			€961.24
William Fry				€206,667.81	€2,083,086.48	€284,980.02	€2,574,734.31
McCann Fitzgerald					€72,570.00	€227,523.00	€300,093.00
Conor Quigley QC				€58,537.93			€58,537.93

Advisor	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total
Denis McDonald SC		€9,332.26	€27,822.60	€53,920.74	€78,322.46		€169,398.06
Barry Doherty BL	€4,113.12	€66,060.15	€1,230.00	€141,656.34	€146,405.67		€359,465.28
John Cooke SC			?	€5,060.00	€7,072.50		€12,132.50
Brian Murray SC				€36,469.50			€36,469.50
Benedict O'Floinn BL				€49,193.85			€49,193.85
Paul Gallagher					€80,456.76		€80,456.76
Noel Travers					€26,377.60		€26,377.60
Dr. Suzanne Kingston					€53,172.90		€53,172.90
Catherine Donnelly					€40,021.74		€40,021.74
Total	€4,113.12	€177,735.84	€325,050.40	€693,757.98	€2,815,755.94	€512,503.02	€4,528,916.30

Insurance Data

49. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of insurance policies in which premiums were returned since 2010; the value of the premiums returned in which an insurance policy was classed as invalid as a result of non-disclosure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23044/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In my role as Minister for Finance, I am responsible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation. Consequently, my Department has no role in collecting the information being sought by the Deputy.

My officials contacted the Central Bank of Ireland in relation to this matter and were advised that it does not collect information from insurance providers regarding either the number of policies in respect of which premiums were returned, or, therefore, the value of such returned premiums. Insurance Ireland also confirmed that it does not collect data on such a basis.

I understand on a general basis that when an insurance policy is cancelled before expiration, either by the insurer or the policyholder, some level of refund may be paid to the consumer, depending on factors such as the specific terms of the relevant contract and the period of time remaining on the contract at the point of cancellation.

If a consumer is unhappy with the value of the premium returned following a policy cancellation, they should initially submit a complaint in writing to the company itself, go through its complaint handling process to conclusion, and be issued with a Final Response Letter. At that stage, if the consumer remains dissatisfied, they can then refer the complaint to the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman, the statutory official who acts as an independent arbiter of disputes which consumers may have with their insurance company or other financial service provider.

Insurance Industry Regulation

50. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the details of the information contained in the insurance link database; the body which owns the database; the procedure for a new insurance firm entering Ireland to gain access to the database; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23045/18]

51. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the information contained in the integrated information data service database; the body which owns the database; the procedure for a new insurance firm entering Ireland to gain access to the database; and if he will make

a statement on the matter. [23046/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 50 and 51 together.

The data services referenced by the Deputy are operated by Insurance Ireland, a representative trade body for the insurance sector.

As Minister for Finance, I am responsible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation and therefore have no role in the operation of either data services referred to in the parliamentary questions. As a result, I am not in a position to provide the information being sought by the Deputy.

Detail of each of the data services is available on the website of Insurance Ireland which can be accessed at: <http://www.insuranceireland.eu/member-services/shared-services>.

NAMA Operations

52. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Finance the spending commitments or paying down of debt which has been entered into with regard to the profits arising from the winding down of NAMA; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23050/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I wish to advise the Deputy that it is expected that NAMA will substantially complete its work by 2020. The Agency announced in October 2017 that it had redeemed all of its €30.2bn in Senior Debt which was guaranteed by the State and in April 2018 it redeemed €243m of its subordinated debt. However, notwithstanding the successful achievement of repaying the State's contingent liability, three years ahead of schedule, there is still a significant body of work yet to be completed by NAMA.

Subject to current market conditions prevailing, this includes redemption of NAMA's remaining subordinated debt of €1.4bn by March 2020 and completion of its Dublin Docklands SDZ and residential funding programmes. It is through the successful completion of its deleveraging, Docklands and residential funding programmes that NAMA currently projects a surplus in the region of €3bn to be returned to the State once it completes its work. As per section 60(2) of the NAMA Act 2009, NAMA may use surplus funds to redeem and cancel its senior and subordinated debt. Surplus funds may only be returned to the Central Fund once NAMA's debt has been redeemed in full.

Any NAMA surplus paid, while Exchequer positive, will not impact the general government balance, in line with Eurostat rules. It will be a decision for the Government as to how any surplus returned by NAMA will be utilised within the framework of the fiscal rules. However, the intention has always been to use such receipts from the resolution of the financial sector crisis to pay down our national debt and reduce our debt servicing costs.

Tax Treaties

53. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the status of the blacklisting of Ireland as a tax haven by the Brazilian Federal Revenue Service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23055/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): There has been ongoing engagement between Irish and Brazilian officials on the issue of Ireland being included on a Brazilian tax

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

The Brazilian authorities have again made clear that they do not consider Ireland to be a tax haven. Ireland have been included on the Brazilian list solely due to having a standard corporate tax rate below 17%. I believe it is inappropriate to include Ireland on the list on the basis of our longstanding 12.5% corporation tax rate.

Officials from my Department and officials from the Revenue Commissioners continue to actively support the Irish Ambassador to Brazil in our efforts to seek Ireland’s removal from the Brazilian list.

State Claims Agency

54. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of funds set aside on an annual basis for contingent liability by the State Claims Agency, SCA, per year for the past 25 years; the way in which the amount that is forecast to be needed for contingent liability is determined; if the SCA carries out an actuarial analysis for budgeting current and future contingent liability; if the SCA conducts a risk assessment in the context of contingent liability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23056/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am informed by the State Claims Agency (SCA) that as of 23 May 2018, the figures outlined in the table show the contingent liability, or rather the Outstanding Estimated Liability, on all active claims across all delegated State Authorities under their aegis.

Outstanding Estimated Liability is the SCA’s best current estimate of the ultimate cost of resolving a claim. It includes all foreseeable costs such as settlement amounts, claimant legal costs and defence costs (such as fees payable to legal counsel, engineers, consultants etc.). Estimated liability may be revised on a regular basis in light of any new information received.

While the SCA commenced activities in 2001, it has informed me that it only has records in relation to the Outstanding Estimated Liability on Active claims since 2009.

The table shows the Outstanding Estimated Liability on all Active claims covering all delegated State Authorities as at the year-end specified from 2009 to 2017. The figures in the table were correct as per the end of each year specified.

As at Year End	Outstanding Estimated Liability (€m) on Active Claims
2009	725
2010	885
2011	991.1
2012	1,126.9
2013	1,223.7
2014	1,469
2015	1,789
2016	2,201
2017	2,662.5

With regard to forecast and analysis for budgeting current and future contingent liability, the

SCA engages an independent third party actuary, Lane Clark and Peacock, to design and build actuarial models, based on the Agency's data, to predict the yearly cost of managing the Clinical and General Indemnity Schemes.

Regarding the conduct of a risk assessment in the context of the contingent liability the SCA also engages a third party auditor to review the process of setting the contingent liability.

Tax Collection

55. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance if an arrangement can be made for a person (details supplied) to meet with the relevant Revenue Commissioners official with a view to reaching agreement on a matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23085/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that there has been previous contact with the person concerned regarding an unpaid tax debt. Revenue is happy to meet with the person concerned with a view to finding a mutually agreeable approach to resolving matters. The person concerned should now contact Ms. Mary Dronney of the Collector-General's Division (telephone 061 488204) with a view to arranging such a meeting.

Legislative Programme

56. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance when he expects limited partnership legislation to be introduced; the number of limited partnerships established here each year since 2013; the way in which this compares with other European countries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23088/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Due to changes in the global private equity market in both structure and relevant European legislation, there is a need to update the Investment Limited Partnership (ILP) Act 1994. This objective has been included in the IFS2020 Action Plan which commits to developing amendments to the Investment Limited Partnership Act 1994 to make the structure more attractive to fund managers.

My Department sought and obtained approval from the Government for the preparation of Heads of Bill in 2017. The Heads of Bill have been sent to the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel and a drafter has been assigned to work on this.

The Bill appears on the legislative programme for 2018 and it is anticipated that the draft legislation will be developed in the second half of the year with the intention for the Bill to be considered by the House before the end of this year.

I have been informed by the Central Bank of Ireland that there are currently 7 Investment Limited Partnerships authorised by it and they supplied the following breakdown:

YEAR	Number of ILPs Registered
2013	3
2014	0
2015	2
2016	1
2017	0

With regard to Limited Partnerships, the relevant legislation that applies to these is the responsibility of my colleague, the Minister for Business, Enterprise & Innovation. I have been informed by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation of the numbers of Limited Partnerships established in Ireland since 2013, and this is outlined in the following table.

Year	Number of Limited Partnerships (LPs) Registered
2013	45
2014	71
2015	87
2016	431
2017	676

I have also been informed by the Central Bank of Ireland and the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation that they do not have any statistics on the numbers of Limited Partnerships or Investment Limited Partnerships established in other parts of Europe. The Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation point out however that based on data from Companies House (UK), the number of Limited Partnerships Incorporated in the UK at end of period:

Year	Number of Limited Partnerships (LPs) Registered
2012-2013	2,,769
2013-2014	4,026
2014-2015	4,545
2015-2016	6,544
2016-2017	5,650

With regard to other European countries, Limited Partnerships as a structure are either not available in other European countries or are not directly comparable to the structures within Ireland. For example Germany has a partnership structure that is utilised for investment funds but the structure differs to that within Ireland, and France has introduced a form of limited partnership in 2015.

Mortgage Data

57. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of securitised Irish PDH mortgage loans here; the number of securitised Irish BTL mortgages here; the number of securitised Irish commercial loans here; the comparative number of loans securitised in each year since 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23089/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I wish to advise the Deputy that my department does not hold the information that is being sought. The query was sent to the Central Bank who advised that they do not collect data on the number of loans securitised by the breakdown requested.

However, the Central Bank provided data on the outstanding stock of PDH and BTL loans securitised and serviced by Irish credit institutions since December 2010.

€ million	PDH	BTL
Dec 2013	32,065	6,988
Dec 2014	30,356	6,847

€ million	PDH	BTL
Dec 2015	26,722	6,678
Dec 2016	26,689	6,471
Dec 2017	21,438	5,722

The full table can be found at https://www.centralbank.ie/docs/default-source/statistics/data-and-analysis/credit-and-banking-statistics/private-household-credit-and-deposits/private-household-credit-and-deposits-data/ie_table_a-18-2_credit_advanced_to_irish_resident_private_households_for_house_purchase.xls?sfvrsn=15

Mortgage Data

58. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of securitisation transactions involving Irish PDH and BTL mortgages that have taken place in each year since 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23090/18]

59. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated impact on borrowers if a mortgage loan or commercial loan is securitised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23091/18]

60. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the party which makes the key decisions on underlying loans (details supplied); the regulatory position with regard to the beneficial owner in a securitisation model; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23092/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 58 to 60, inclusive, together.

I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department does not hold the information that is being sought. The Central Bank also advised that it does not collect data on the number of loans securitised by the breakdown requested. However, the Bank provided data on the outstanding stock in monetary terms of residential PDH and BTL loans securitised and serviced by Irish credit institutions since December 2013.

€ million	PDH	BTL
Dec 2013	32,065	6,988
Dec 2014	30,356	6,847
Dec 2015	26,722	6,678
Dec 2016	26,689	6,471
Dec 2017	21,438	5,722

The full table can be found at https://www.centralbank.ie/docs/default-source/statistics/data-and-analysis/credit-and-banking-statistics/private-household-credit-and-deposits/private-household-credit-and-deposits-data/ie_table_a-18-2_credit_advanced_to_irish_resident_private_households_for_house_purchase.xls?sfvrsn=15.

Although each securitisation will be different, in general terms under a securitisation a bank assigns its beneficial interest in a portfolio of its loans to a special purpose vehicle in order to secure additional funding or some other benefit for the bank. However, unlike a loan sale, the bank generally continues to retain the legal title to the loan assets and to service, manage and carry out the creditor's rights and obligations under the credit agreement in relation to the borrower; likewise the debtor's obligations under the loan contract will continue to be to the bank.

In terms of consumer and other borrower protections, the legal and regulatory provisions, including the Central Bank codes and SME lending regulations, which apply to the provision and operation of mortgage or other loans to relevant borrowers will continue to apply irrespective of the status of the creditor. In particular, the provisions of the Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing Firms) Act 2015 ensure that consumers, whose loans are sold to an entity which is not regulated by the Central Bank, will maintain the same Central Bank regulatory protections they had prior to the sale. Furthermore, the options and frameworks available to insolvent borrowers under the Personal Insolvency Act 2012 as amended will also apply irrespective of the status of the creditor party to a loan contract.

Legal Costs

61. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the legal fees incurred to date by the Office of the Information Commissioner in respect of the proceedings in the High Court and Court of Appeal further to the judgment of the Court of Appeal in a case (details supplied). [22924/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised that the Office of the Information Commissioner has incurred legal fees of €110,014 to date in respect of the proceedings in the High Court and the Court of Appeal in relation to the case in question.

State Bodies Expenditure

62. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the Office of the Information Commissioner is subject to budgetary constraints when engaging in litigation whether as an applicant, defendant or notice party. [22927/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Office of the Information Commissioner is funded through Vote 19 – the Office of the Ombudsman. Vote 19 provides for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Ombudsman, the Office of the Commission for Public Service Appointments, the Standards in Public Office Commission, the Office of the Information Commissioner and the Office of the Commissioner for Environmental Information.

The funding allocated to the Vote each year is based on agreed estimates of the salaries and expenses of the various component Offices. While the organisation has a certain amount of discretion in how it allocates that funding between the Offices and in how it assigns staff to the Offices depending on levels of demand, it must operate within the constraints of the funding allocated.

Each Office within the Vote must also operate within the constraints of the funding allocated each year in so far as possible. A certain amount of funding is allocated for legal expenditure for the Office of the Information Commissioner based on an estimate of the expenditure likely to arise. However, the nature of litigation is such that it is very difficult to predict, with any real degree of accuracy, the likely amount of expenditure on legal fees in any given year. Such expenditure is generally beyond the control of the Office in so far as the relevant statutes provide for the right of appeal to the courts.

Public Sector Pensions

63. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if all existing public servants can work beyond 66 years of age under a new scheme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23084/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Single Public Service Pension Scheme (Single Scheme), which was introduced on 1 January 2013 under the Public Service Pensions (Single Scheme and Other Provisions) Act 2012, applies to all first-time new entrants to the public service from that date. It also applies to former pensionable public servants returning to public service employment after a break of more than 26 weeks, as well as to all former non-pensionable public servants returning to public service employment regardless of how short the break in employment.

For most Single Scheme members, the minimum pension age is aligned to the Contributory State Pension qualifying age and is currently set at age 66, rising to age 67 in 2021 and age 68 in 2028, while the maximum pension age is 70, upon which a Scheme member must retire.

The 2012 Act also provides that a Scheme member may retire early from age 55, with actuarially reduced benefits, provided they meet certain qualifying conditions and their Relevant Authority/employer consents.

There are separate, lower minimum pension ages in the Single Scheme for certain non-standard (“fast-accrual”) membership categories such as An Garda Síochána, the Permanent Defence Force, Prison Officers and Firefighters.

For further information, the Deputy will be aware that my Department is currently working on primary legislation to increase the compulsory retirement age to 70, for public servants recruited prior to 1 April 2004. No change is being made to the minimum pension age. Once this legislation is commenced, the earliest compulsory retirement age that will apply to the vast majority of public servants will be age 70.

Skills Development

64. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the 2018 digital economy and society index by the European Commission; and his further views on more than half of the Irish adult population lacking at least basic digital skills. [22980/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): In the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2018, Ireland ranks among the high-performing cluster of countries in 6th position, up three positions from DESI 2017. Ireland ranks first in the share of young people holding a Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) degree. However, the report also states that more than half of the population lack basic digital skills.

The Irish Government recognises the importance of Digital Literacy in facilitating the full inclusion of all members of our society. The Action Plan for Jobs 2018 contains a commitment to develop a high level National Digital Strategy, to provide a coherent vision across sectoral policies to position Ireland to maximise economic and societal benefits from digitalisation.

A range of actions are in place across the education and training system to support the acquisition of enhanced digital skills and to increase the use of digital technologies in teaching and learning. These build on actions on digital skills set out in the National Skills Strategy 2025.

In 2015, my Department published the Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020 which in-

cludes a range of relevant actions that will support the development of digital skills both directly through specific curriculum content and through technology enhanced learning across the curriculum.

Within the Higher Education sector, a number of actions are included to implement the Roadmap for Enhancement in a Digital World 2015-2017 aimed at supporting the development and embedding of digital capacity in teaching and learning activities and developing consistent digital experiences for learners.

There are considerable changes occurring within the Further Education Sector (FET) to improve the existing capacity in the area of digital inclusion and the provision of digital skills in FET. The Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) in Further Education and Training 2016 – 2019 Strategy will build on existing capacity and good practice in TEL to expand access to and continuously improve and innovate FET provision.

A range of programmes are provided within ETBs for individuals who wish to develop their digital literacy. Basic ICT tuition is integrated within adult literacy and numeracy provision. Opportunities for basic skills provision is offered through a variety of providers via a broad range of ETB FET provision delivered in adult education centres, community education settings and training centres. Delivery of these programmes is designed to meet the needs of participants' personal and career goals and are offered on a full and part-time basis. These courses are supported through the funding provided to the Adult Literacy Programme, Bridging and Foundation Training, Local Training Initiatives, Community Education, Youthreach and the BTEI (Back to Education Initiative). Some of these programmes combine transversal skills such as literacy, numeracy, digital skills, communications and teamworking with specific occupational skills.

In 2017 a total of 58,103 beneficiaries availed of FET programmes within the ICT skills cluster. This is in addition to 180,000 beneficiaries of core personal skills training and general learning programmes which typically include digital literacy elements.

Departmental Reviews

65. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the independent review of existing career guidance tools and career information for students and adults will include special schools in its terms of reference; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22905/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can assure the deputy that the views of special schools will be included in this review.

The purpose of the review of career guidance is to ensure that high quality, relevant career guidance information is provided to students from post-primary level up to further and higher education. The review will examine, inter alia, the quality of information available to students and adults in relation to career guidance, the sources of this information and how the system is organised to support students and adults in this area.

The review is being carried out by independent consultants and will be guided and informed by a Steering Group. As an integral part of the consultants' proposed methodological approach to the review, my Department has invited submissions from all interested stakeholders to assist in shaping the review by highlighting key issues to be considered in the course of carrying out the review. Drawing on the results of the consultation and further consideration by the Steering Group the question of the specific role and objectives of career guidance in supporting students

in special schools will be assessed further.

The closing date for receipt of submissions is Friday 25 May 2018. Details surrounding the consultation process have been published on the Department's website (www.education.ie).

As I indicated in the house this week, if there is a particular group that needs to make a submission, and it believes it will not be able to do so by 25th May, I will make sure that the submission is accommodated. I am pleased that we have already received a significant number of submissions from special schools.

Schools Building Projects Status

66. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a request for a school extension by a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22935/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The major building project for the school referred to by the Deputy is at an early stage of architectural planning - Stage 1. A revised Stage 1 submission, including an up to date cost plan, was requested from the Design Team following an increase in the schedule of accommodation to cater for up to 1200 pupils.

The Department has this week received a soft copy of the revised Stage 1 submission. The submission will be reviewed by the Professional and Technical staff in the Department.

The school and its Design Team will then be invited to meet with the Department and subject to no issues arising the project can be authorised to progress to Stage 2a - Developed Design.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

67. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 91 of 17 May 2018, if he will address concerns (details supplied). [22943/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible, through its network of Special Needs Organisers, for the development and delivery and co-ordination of education services to children with special educational needs.

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

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

To this end, the NCSE has indicated that it intends to establish approximately 145 new special classes for the forthcoming school year. Details of all classes are available at www.ncse.ie.

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

Student Support Schemes

68. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there are facilities or schemes to financially aid pupils of minority faiths who are not within commuting distance of a non-Catholic secondary school to attend schools with boarding fees; and if so, the facility or grant available. [22949/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): There is a historic block grant provided to the minority faith Protestant churches.

It is provided through a mechanism put in place by the Protestant churches, the Secondary Education Committee (SEC) whose function is to support the children of minority Protestant faith in accessing education.

The SEC operates a means-tested student support scheme that enables necessitous children of the Protestant community to attend a Post-Primary school whose ethos accords with their faith traditions, including if applicable a boarding school.

Higher Education Authority

69. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason four members of the Higher Education Authority who are not ordinarily resident in the State have remained as members of the authority despite section 9 of the Schedule to the Higher Education Authority Act 1971 stating that such persons shall be disqualified from holding and shall cease to hold office in circumstances in which they cease to be ordinarily resident in the State. [23018/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As I set out in my reply to the Deputy's question on this matter in PQ No. 27933 on 29 September 2016, the current members of the Board of the Higher Education Authority have been appointed in line with the terms of the Higher Education Authority Act, 1971 and it should be noted that the legislation does not state that in order to be appointed to the Board a member must be ordinarily resident in the State.

Higher Education Authority Administration

70. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to a group within an application (details supplied) that has been established for communication by members of the Higher Education Authority; his views on whether this is an appropriate method of communication between members of the authority; if a record is kept of all such communications; and if they are subject to freedom of information legislation. [23019/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The HEA has confirmed that a WhatsApp group has been established by members of the HEA board. It has also been confirmed that the purpose of this group is to arrange meetings and other logistical arrangements and is not used to discuss the on-going work of the Board.

I understand that content from WhatsApp, which has been accessed from state-owned mobile devices, has been previously released under the Freedom of Information legislation.

DEIS Eligibility

71. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to issues raised in a Topical Issue debate of 22 February 2018 (details supplied), when a decision will be reached on this application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23058/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy will be aware, an update of the identification model is currently underway. This will take account of updated school data as provided by schools for the current school year combined with the Pobal HP Index of Deprivation, based on CSO Small Area Population statistics derived from the 2016 National Census.

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

School Staff

72. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding teaching numbers at a school (details supplied) in Dublin 11; the reason for the proposed change; if the matter will be reconsidered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23087/18]

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 school referred to by the Deputy is due to have its mainstream staffing reduced by 1 for the coming school year due to a fall in enrolments.

The staffing schedule also includes an appeals mechanism for schools to submit a staffing appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board.

The school referred to by the Deputy submitted an application for consideration by the Appeals Board at its March meeting under the Exceptional Accommodation Difficulties criteria. The Appeals Board considered the appeal and determined that it did not warrant the allocation of an additional post under Circular 0010/2018.

The school has been notified of the outcome of the appeal. The Appeals Board operates independently of the Department and its decision is final.

Visa Applications

73. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of a visa application by persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22906/18]

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

The position in the State of the persons concerned will now be decided by reference to the provisions of Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and all other applicable legislation. All representations submitted will be fully considered in advance of a final decision being made.

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

Garda Procedures

74. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the way in which a person (details supplied) can seek recourse from the State in cases in which the State Claims Agency refused to reimburse a person who had their property damaged by An Garda Síochána during a lawful raid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22940/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy is aware, I am unable to comment on individual cases.

However, I can say, in general terms, that claims from property owners for damage caused to their properties arising from searches undertaken by the Garda Síochána are delegated to and managed by the State Claims Agency (SCA). Each claim is considered separately having regard to the particular facts of the case.

The general policy of the State Claims Agency, in relation to such claims, is that where the Gardaí cause damage to property in conducting a search, any claim from the property owner in respect of that damage is contested unless there's demonstrable negligence on the part of the Garda authorities. Other relevant factors taken into account include whether the Gardaí were acting on foot of a search warrant or whether they had other lawful authority to carry out a forced entry to a premises. Search warrants authorise the Gardaí to use force to gain entry to a property if necessary and the Gardaí have no legal liability to the property owner for the damage caused in forcing entry to the property in those circumstances. The approach taken by the State Claims Agency in contesting these claims has been upheld by the Courts in a number of claims brought to Court by property owners.

It is not my function to offer legal advice to the individual referred to in the Deputy's question but it is clearly open to that person to seek their own legal advice on the options open to them.

Garda Vetting

75. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding Garda vetting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22948/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will appreciate that the primary purpose of the employment vetting carried out by the Garda National Vetting Bureau is to seek to ensure the safety of children and vulnerable adults. Vetting is carried

out by An Garda Síochána primarily in accordance with the provisions of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012-2016.

Vetting checks are conducted by the Garda National Vetting Bureau for each new vetting application received to ensure that the most recent data available is taken into account. This is because once there has been any significant lapse of time between one employment and another, the original vetting disclosure must be reviewed to take account of any changes in information, such as more recent criminal convictions.

Furthermore, data protection law requires that any sensitive personal data which employers use in regard to their employees must be current, accurate and up-to-date. Importantly, the general non-transferability and contemporaneous nature of the current process also helps to protect against the risk of fraud or forgery in the process.

The National Vetting Bureau has deployed an e-vetting system which facilitates the on-line processing of applications for vetting from registered organisations. The e-vetting system is available to all registered organisations and I am informed that the Garda Authorities are ready to assist those organisations who are not yet using the e-vetting system to do so. Notwithstanding a recent increase in the volume of applications submitted to the Bureau, processing times are generally in the order of a 5-6 working day turnaround for 80% of applications received. In circumstances where there is such a sustained reduction in processing times, the issue of vetting “transferability” is largely obviated.

The Deputy will wish to know that there are certain limited circumstances where organisations can share a single vetting disclosure where this is agreed to by the vetting applicant and the organisations in question in accordance with section 12 of the Acts.

Garda Complaints Procedures

76. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 347 of 10 March 2015, if a full investigation will take place into the level of Garda special branch knowledge of this activity in view of the fact that in response to Parliamentary Question No. 7 of 30 April 2014 it was stated that information on these illegal actions should be thoroughly investigated and that a complaint in regard to this hacked material was lodged with the Garda cybercrime unit in 2017. [22958/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I refer to the replies to the previous parliamentary questions referred to by the Deputy and also to a letter dated 26 March 2015 from my predecessor to you in relation to the matter raised.

I have requested a report from the Garda Commissioner in relation to the matter referred to by the Deputy concerning a complaint lodged with the Garda Cybercrime Unit in 2017. I will reply further to the Deputy when this report is to hand.

Court Procedures

77. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to introduce legislation to rectify an apparent inconsistency (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23010/18]

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 responsi-

bility of the Courts Service, which is independent in exercising its functions, which include the provision of information on the courts system.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has advised that there is no inconsistency between the section of the Act and the rule of court (Court Order) referred to by the Deputy. By virtue of section 4(1) of the Act, section 18(h) applies to an enactment (including a rule of court) except in so far as the contrary intention appears in this Act, in the enactment itself (in this instance, the rule of court concerned) or, where relevant, in the Act under which the enactment is made. The effect of section 4(1) is that if a contrary intention appears in another enactment when considering whether a provision of the Act applies, the Act provision will not apply.

Prison Investigations

78. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the cost of each of the two reports commissioned into the release of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23012/18]

79. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 126 of 10 May 2018, the basis upon which he referred to the original report (details supplied) as a draft and operational in view of the fact that neither of these terms is in accordance with the facts of the terms of reference or the investigation. [23013/18]

80. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 126 of 10 May 2018, if the facts surrounding the release of a person (details supplied) were established in the report which resulted in the IPS incorporating aspects of the report into Circular OPS 12/2011. [23014/18]

81. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 126 of 10 May 2017, the detail of the legal and procedural flaws in the original investigation conducted. [23015/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 78 to 81, inclusive, together.

I am advised by the Irish Prison Service (IPS) that the Terms of Reference for the original external report was to investigate the case of a specific person and to report directly to the Director General. It was considered an operational matter as it related to an incident that occurred in the Dochas Centre. It was not envisaged that the report would be furnished to any party to the enquiry.

As had been outlined in the answers to previous Parliamentary Questions relating to this matter, a review of the report by the Director General of the IPS highlighted some legal and procedural flaws in the way in which the enquiry was conducted. This included the fact that there was an absence of documentary evidence to show that all of those who had participated in the enquiry were given an opportunity to comment on the accuracy of the comments attributed to them by the investigators. In addition, where third parties were named, such individuals were not given an opportunity to respond.

In order to address those issues a second external investigator was appointed to review the original report and try to bring the enquiry to a satisfactory conclusion. Regrettably, for reasons outlined in the answer to parliamentary question 6552/18, it was not possible to do so.

I am further advised by the IPS that, notwithstanding the legal and procedural flaws which were highlighted in the original report, the recommendations were reviewed on their own merits to see if they could benefit the operation of the Prison Service. Some of these recommendations were incorporated into Circular OPS 12/2011 'Consolidated Guidelines for Prisoners Released on Temporary Release' which was supported by the 'Consolidated Temporary Release Guidelines' which issued in 2012. The recommendations which were incorporated were that prisoners should have the terms and conditions of their temporary release explained to them, that the prisoner must acknowledge the conditions of the temporary release and sign the Temporary Release form, the prisoner must consent to being granted a period of temporary release and that a written record of the decision must be placed on the Prisoner Information and Management System.

I am also advised that the total costs associated with the commission of the investigation report was €32,140.60 and €900 for the review. This amount included payments which related to travel and associated expenses.

Visa Applications

82. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of his Department's dealings with a visa application by a person (details supplied) which is currently before the courts [23017/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that this case relates to a person who brought a Judicial Review to the High Court. As the case is still *sub judice* I do not propose to comment further at this time.

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

Garda Deployment

83. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when additional personnel and resources will be allocated to counties Cavan and Monaghan Garda division; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23021/18]

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

I am informed by the Commissioner that the strength of Cavan/Monaghan Division on 30 April 2018, the latest date for which information is readily available, was 344. There are also 11 Garda Reserves and 38 Garda civilian staff attached to the Cavan/Monaghan Division. When appropriate, the work of local Gardaí is supported by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Armed Support Units, the Garda National

Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau.

The Deputy will also be aware that there is close and ongoing cooperation between An Garda Síochána and the PSNI on all aspects of policing, with a particular focus on combatting security threats and cross-border crime. The Commissioner and the Chief Constable of the PSNI, who are responsible for operational policing cooperation, have repeatedly emphasised the scope and the value of the close and high quality cooperation between the two police services in combating crime, protecting community safety and saving lives. The two police services operate a joint Cross-Border Policing Strategy which has as its aims to improve public safety throughout Ireland, to disrupt criminal activity and to enhance the policing capability of both police services on the island.

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

Since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, just under 1,800 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide including 53 to the Cavan/Monaghan Division, 13 of whom were allocated from the most recent attestation of new Gardaí in March. Garda numbers, taking account of retirements, increased to 13,551 at the end of 2017 – a net increase of over 600 since the end of 2016.

I am pleased that funding is in place to maintain this high level of investment in the Garda workforce to ensure that the vision of an overall workforce of 21,000 by 2021 remains on track. This year a further 800 new Garda Recruits will enter the Garda College, some 400 of whom have already done so. In total, 800 Garda trainees are scheduled to attest during the year which will see Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, reach 14,000 by the end of this year.

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

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

The investment in personnel I have outlined is complemented by substantial investment in resources across the board for An Garda Síochána. The Capital Plan 2016 – 2021 provides for an investment of €46 million the Garda fleet to ensure that An Garda Síochána has a modern, effective and fit for purpose fleet. This is in addition to the investment of almost €30 million in the period 2013 to 2015.

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

This investment will facilitate the provision of more effective policing services and I expect that the Cavan/Monaghan, like all other Garda Divisions will benefit from these new resources

becoming available.

Sex Offenders Notification Requirements

84. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to amend the Sex Offenders Act 2001 to ensure that victims are informed when a sex offender is appealing to be removed from the sex offenders register; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23036/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): There have been a number of developments over recent years which allow for information to be passed to victims of crime by the Garda Síochána's Victims Services Offices, in particular the coming into force of the Criminal Justice (Victims of Crime) Act 2017. That Act provides that victims of crime can receive information from the relevant criminal justice agency at all stages of criminal proceedings up to and including the offender's release from custody.

Upon their release from custody sex offenders are required to register with An Garda Síochána for a set period up to life, depending on the sentence that they received at trial. The Sex Offenders Act 2001 contains a provision at section 10 that allows a registered sex offender to apply to the courts to have their name removed from the Register once a period of at least ten years has elapsed since their release. Prior to any such application they must first inform An Garda Síochána of their intention to do so.

I will shortly bring to Government a General Scheme of a Sex Offenders (Amendment) Bill. The Bill will update the law as it relates to sexual offenders following a comprehensive review of current legislative and administrative provisions. Among the provisions proposed in the Scheme are:

- Changes to the notification requirements for sex offenders;
- Risk assessment of convicted persons;
- Disclosure of information by an Garda Síochána, relating to persons on the sex offender register, in extenuating circumstances;
- Electronic monitoring of sex offenders;
- Amendment and variation of a sex offender order (including the addition of electronic monitoring to an order); and
- Provisions whereby a court can prohibit a sex offender from working with children.

The Oireachtas will, of course, have the opportunity to consider this Bill once it is published. I am happy to consider further proposals regarding this issue.

Garda Equipment

85. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the estimated cost of the roll-out of body cameras for all gardaí; if he has received such a request from the Garda Commissioner; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23054/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will appreciate that the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the provision of equipment for An Garda

Síochána including specialist equipment such as body worn cameras and that I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

I have been informed by the Garda authorities that a working group is currently researching and exploring options for the potential use of body worn cameras in An Garda Síochána. I have been further informed by the Garda authorities that this working group is examining issues including current legislation, the procurement process, storage of data and solutions in other jurisdictions.

I understand that the Garda authorities are not yet in a position to estimate the overall cost of a potential rollout of body cameras.

Immigration Status

86. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status and eligibility for upgrade or naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23061/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person has remained in the State without appropriate permission.

Given that the person concerned has failed to register with the Garda National Immigration Bureau, the person should write to the Department immediately outlining their position in the State.

As INIS hold no records of the person, a representative of the Department can only consider the options available to the applicant from the correspondence received.

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

Immigration Status

87. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if and when a person (details supplied) might qualify for stamp 4 eligibility for naturalisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23062/18]

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

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

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the

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

Immigration Status

88. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if and when stamp 4 will be renewed in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23063/18]

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

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

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

Naturalisation Applications

89. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if an application for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied) can be reconsidered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23066/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that an application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy was refused for reasons provided to the person concerned in a letter issued on 28 March 2018 advising of the decision.

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

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

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

Immigration Status

90. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a person (details supplied) is eligible to apply for long-term residency or naturalisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23069/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that there is no record of an application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy. This person currently has permission to reside in the State until 28 July 2019. A determination on whether an applicant satisfies the statutory criteria attendant to naturalisation can only be made after an application is received. In order to make an application for Long Term Residency in the State the person concerned must have been legally resident in the State for a minimum of 5 years (i.e. 60 months) on work permit/work authorisation/working visa conditions.

It is open to any individual to lodge an application for a certificate of naturalisation if and when they are in a position to meet the statutory requirements as prescribed in the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended, which governs the granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation.

Detailed information on Irish citizenship and naturalisation, as well as the relevant application forms, is available on the INIS website at www.inis.gov.ie. The website also contains guidance on the completion of an application for naturalisation and an on-line naturalisation residency calculator which individuals may find of assistance in establishing if the statutory residency requirements are met.

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

Residency Permits

91. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the procedure to be followed to regularise residency in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23072/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy is aware, if an application for asylum or subsidiary protection has been made in the State, for confidentiality reasons it is not the practice to comment on such applications and the applicant or their legal representative should contact the International Protection Office directly either by email to info@ipo.gov.ie, by telephone to the IPO Customer Service Centre at 01 6028008 or in writing to Customer Service Centre, International Protection Office, 79-83 Lower Mount Street, Dublin 2.

Following the commencement of the International Protection Act 2015 on 31 December 2016, new arrangements for the investigation and determination of applications for international protection (refugee status and subsidiary protection) and cases involving permission to remain in the State have been introduced. Such applications are now processed, as part of a single application procedure, by the International Protection Office (IPO) which has replaced the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) from that date. The staff of that Office (the Chief International Protection Officer and International Protection Officers) are independent in the performance of their protection functions.

For your information, on 27 February 2017, the Chief International Protection Officer, following consultation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), published a statement on the Prioritisation of Applications under the International Protection Act 2015 which is available on the website of the International Protection Office (www.ipo.gov.ie).

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

Garda Deployment

92. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the number of Garda sergeants in a station (details supplied) has been halved since 2010; the steps he is taking to address this situation in view of the ongoing gangland feud; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23083/18]

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

As the Deputy will be aware the Ballymun Garda Station forms part of the Dublin Metropolitan Region (DMR) North Division. I am informed by the Commissioner that on 30 April 2018, the latest date for which figures are readily available, the strength of the DMR North Division was 678, of whom 120 were assigned to Ballymun Garda Station including 12 sergeants. There are also 42 Garda Reserves and 40 civilians attached to the Division. When appropriate, the work of local Gardaí is supported by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Armed Support Units, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau. More than 120 extra Garda were assigned to the specialist units within Special Crime Operations since 2017. In

addition, a dedicated Armed Support Unit for the DMR was established at the end of 2016 in order to enhance armed support capability in Dublin.

I am also advised that a number of measures have been put in place to address the difficulties experienced in Ballymun. These measures include additional high-visibility patrols, support from the regional public order unit and operations by the local drug unit and will continue into the future.

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

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

I am pleased that funding is in place to maintain this high level of investment in the Garda workforce to ensure that the vision of an overall workforce of 21,000 by 2021 remains on track. This year a further 800 new Garda Recruits will enter the Garda College; some 400 of whom have already done so. In total, 800 Garda trainees are scheduled to attest during the year, some 200 of whom attested in March. Further, Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, are on track to reach 14,000 by the end of this year.

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

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

Appointments to the ranks of sergeant are a matter for the Commissioner under section 14 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005.

I am advised by the Commissioner that the overall strength of the sergeant rank was 1,852 as of 30 April 2018, the latest date for which figures are available. I am further advised by the Commissioner that there is a competition in train for promotion to the rank of sergeant with the aim of bringing the strength to 2,000, as agreed under the Employment Control Framework. I am assured by the Commissioner that following completion of these competitions the needs of all Garda Divisions including the DMR North Division will be fully considered when determining the allocation of Sergeants.

Drugs Dealing

93. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the further steps that can be taken to protect families and communities from intimidation by drug dealers. [23096/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Drug related intimidation within communities, which are often our most vulnerable communities, is a serious issue that must be addressed by our criminal justice system. Community Policing initiatives and building trust with communities are integral to successfully tackling this issue. An Garda Síochána remains resolute in its determination to act against those within society who pose a significant threat to the welfare and well-being of our citizens and the communities that they serve. The continued disruption of the supply of all illicit drugs remains a priority for all agencies tasked with responsibilities in this regard.

The Deputy may be aware that An Garda Síochána and the National Family Support Network (NFSN) developed “the Drug Related Intimidation Reporting Programme” to respond to the needs of drug users and family members experiencing drug related intimidation. One of the actions being taken forward in 2018 under “Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery - A health led response to drug and alcohol use in Ireland 2017 - 2025”, relates to strengthening the effectiveness of the Reporting Programme. An Garda Síochána and the NFSN will each carry out their own evaluation of the Reporting Programme with a view to informing its further development.

There is growing evidence, both internationally and in Ireland, that partnership approaches involving local communities, state agencies and other stakeholders offer the most effective method of responding to many drug problems, including illicit drug markets. Any proposals for more innovative approaches to the problem, whether adopted from international experience or building on the current approach under Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery, and which offer further value in tackling the problem as it occurs in this jurisdiction will be given due consideration.

Under the Reporting Programme, a Garda Inspector has been selected in every Garda Division to respond to the issue of drug related intimidation. These Inspectors are at management level within An Garda Síochána and liaise directly with their local Superintendent in relation to each individual case. Persons seeking the assistance of the Inspector in their area may contact them to arrange to meet either formally or informally. It is also possible for a person to ask a local family support worker or drugs worker to contact the Garda Inspector for their area or to ask the National Family Support Network to contact the relevant Inspector. The contact details for the nominated Garda Inspectors are available on the Garda website.

An Garda Síochána is currently delivering seminars and briefings to local Garda management on the Reporting Programme and gathering feedback as to its performance.

In dealing with any reports of drug related intimidation, or advice sought in relation to this issue, I am informed that An Garda Síochána do so with the utmost regard to the safety of the person making a report and the most effective means available to afford persons subject to a threat, the best level of security, advice and support that can be offered. Most importantly, all reports are handled with the utmost regard to confidentiality.

At the heart of the concerns expressed by the Deputy, is the relationship between communities and their local Gardaí. It is worth recalling that the Programme for a Partnership Government underlines the importance of community policing in responding to the concerns and expectations of both urban and rural communities. I would like to re-affirm that the Government remains committed to supporting An Garda Síochána to make communities safer. The Government has allocated very significant resources to policing in recent years, and this will continue, in particular through the accelerated programme of Garda recruitment. This undoubtedly will enhance policing services for all communities across the country.

An Garda Síochána is involved in a variety of activities, including Local and Regional Drug

and Alcohol Task Forces, Garda Youth Diversion Projects which support the operation of the statutory Diversion Programme, the Garda Schools Programme and proactive operations designed to address drug supply in communities. I would also like to emphasise in particular, that where communities experience intimidation, Joint Policing Committees have a very important role in facilitating consultation, cooperation and synergy on policing and crime issues between An Garda Síochána, Local Authorities and elected local representatives. Active engagement by elected members is very important.

Departmental Contracts

94. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if she is satisfied that all contracts a company (details supplied) holds with her Department and State agencies under her aegis have been tendered for; if her attention has been drawn to contracts awarded to the company that have not been tendered for; if her attention has been further drawn to contracts awarded to the company that have rolled over; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [21667/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department, and the agencies under its aegis, comply with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's guidelines for awarding public procurement contracts. Contracts are awarded based on the most economically advantageous tender (specifying, in addition to price, various other criteria including running costs, servicing costs, level of after sales service, and technical merit).

My Department does not have any contracts currently in place with Capita.

I am informed that the agencies under the aegis of my Department have a number of contracts in place with Capita, all of which were awarded following tendering processes and in compliance with public procurement guidelines.

- The Personal Injuries Assessment Board signed a contract in 2014 for business process support services with Southwestern Business Process Services Limited (subsequently acquired by Capita) for an initial period of three years, with the contract providing an option to extend by two periods of 12 months. These options are being exercised and that total value of the contract will be circa €9 million, excluding VAT.

- IDA Ireland signed a four year contract with Capita in 2017 for the provision, implementation and support of a financial management system. The total value of the contract is €154,000, excluding VAT, and it was not rolled over from previous years.

- The National Standards Authority of Ireland currently has three contracts in place with Capita for the provision of IT solutions. The total value of these contracts is €71,000 and two of these contracts were rolled over from previous years, on the basis that the software products being used can only be supported by Capita, as the developer of these products.

IDA Ireland Portfolio

95. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of hectares of land in the ownership of the Industrial Development Authority that are idle. [22896/18]

96. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the

number of hectares of idle land in the ownership of the Industrial Development Authority that are suitable for use for residential development. [22897/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 95 and 96 together.

As of May 2018, the IDA currently owns 1197 hectares that is available for marketing. In addition, IDA also owns circa 135 hectares in estate roads and a further 122 hectares in residual undevelopable land on various industrial estates and business parks. This land is generally held in small tracts which is undevelopable.

IDA land is typically zoned for industrial purposes and I am not aware of any land that is zoned for residential development.

Foreign Direct Investment

97. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if land use efficiency targets are set for foreign multinational corporations occupying IDA procured land; and if not, the reason. [22898/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): IDA does not set specific land use efficiency targets. However, when IDA leases land to an overseas client for the purposes of industrial development, the conditions of the lease state that any development, or buildings erected, must be completed in accordance with plans and specifications that are first approved in writing by IDA. Each lease also outlines a timescale by which the completion of any construction must take place.

IDA Ireland Portfolio

98. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if land procured by the IDA for use by foreign multinational corporations is retained in ownership by the State or the IDA and leased to those corporations on a leasehold basis; and if not, if the land is transferred into the ownership of foreign industry following its procurement by the IDA. [22899/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): IDA properties are made available to the Agency's clients by way of long term leasehold agreements. These leases carry certain use restrictions, such as stipulations that the property can only be used for industrial use or services ancillary to such use.

Competition Law

99. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to order a break up of the big four accounting and auditing firms as is being discussed in the United Kingdom; the research or discussions that have taken place in her Department on the issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22951/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) is the statutory independent body responsible for the enforcement of domestic and EU competition law in the State. Section 9

(5) of the Competition and Consumer Protection Act 2014 provides that the Commission is independent in the performance of its functions, including carrying out investigations of alleged anti-competitive practices or abuses of dominance. As investigations and enforcement matters generally are part of the day-to-day operational work of the Commission, I, as Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, have no direct function in the matter.

Employment Appeals Tribunal

100. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if there is a record of the outcome of an appeal by a person (details supplied) to the Employment Appeals Tribunal relative to a bank; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22971/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): The EAT is independent in the exercise of its quasi-judicial function and I have no direct involvement in its day to day operations.

I should point out to that since 1 October 2015, the functions of the Employment Appeals Tribunal (EAT) have been subsumed into the Workplace Relations Commission which now deals with all employment rights claims at first instance, and the Labour Court which is now the sole appellate body.

In advance of the dissolution of the EAT and in accordance with the provisions of the Workplace Relations Act 2015, the EAT is continuing to work through its legacy caseload.

It is my understanding that the EAT has no record of an appeal in the case referred to by the deputy.

Enterprise Ireland Funding

101. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of applicants that received funding under Enterprise Ireland's high potential start-up feasibility grant in each of the years 2014 to 2017 and to date in 2018, by county; the number that received funding by firm size of less than ten, 11 to 49, 50 to 249 and more than 250 employees; and the amount paid out by county and by firm size in tabular form. [22974/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): HP-SUs are companies which have the potential to develop an innovative product or service suitable for export, and which have the potential to create 10 jobs and €1m in sales within 3 to 4 years of establishment. In 2017 Enterprise Ireland supported 90 HPSUs with an equity investment.

Enterprise Ireland's HPSU Team works with start-up companies to ensure that they can avail of suitable supports to enable them to realise their potential. One of the financial supports that is available to companies is the HPSU Feasibility Grant.

The HPSU Feasibility Grant assists a new start-up company or individual entrepreneur to examine the viability of a new export oriented business or proposition. The objective of the study is to provide the necessary information to enable the promoter to reach firm conclusions regarding the project's viability, and set out investor ready plans associated with developing and commercialising the product or service.

The following tables present an overview of (1) the number of companies in receipt of payments over the period on question; (2) the number of companies in receipt of payments by

company size; and (3) the number of companies in receipt of payments by company size broken down by county.

Table 1: Number of Companies In Receipt Of Payments 2014-21.05.2018

HPSU Feasibility Grant: Number of Enterprise Ireland supported companies in receipt of payments under this grant by County/Year*

Client County	2018 (21.05.18)	2017	2016	2015	2014	2014-21.05.18 Total
Carlow				<5	<5	<5
Cavan					<5	<5
Clare		<5	<5	<5	<5	7
Cork	<5	7	11	19	16	41
Donegal	<5	<5		<5		<5
Dublin	15	51	88	80	116	272
Galway		<5	8	13	12	26
Kerry	<5	<5	<5	<5	<5	10
Kildare		<5	<5	<5	8	14
Kilkenny	<5	<5	<5	<5		5
Laois		<5	<5		<5	6
Leitrim					<5	<5
Limerick	<5	<5	<5	<5	<5	12
Longford			<5	<5	<5	<5
Louth		<5	<5	<5	<5	10
Mayo	<5	<5	<5	<5	9	10
Meath	<5	<5	<5	<5	<5	7
Monaghan			<5	<5	<5	<5
Offaly		<5	<5			<5
Roscommon	<5					<5
Sligo			<5	<5	<5	5
Tipperary North			<5	<5	<5	<5
Tipperary South	<5					<5
Waterford	<5			<5	<5	6
Westmeath		<5	<5	<5	<5	6
Wexford					<5	<5
Wicklow	<5	<5	<5	<5	<5	12
Grand Total	31	86	137	153	202	473

* In order to protect client confidentiality, exact numbers are not released for counties that

have less than five approvals.

Table 2: The Number of Companies In Receipt Of Payments By Company Size

HPSU Feasibility Grant (2014- 21.05.18): Number of Enterprise Ireland supported Companies in receipt of Payments by company size (All counties)

Company Size	Total
over 50	7
Less than 11	391
Between 11-49	75
Grand Total	473

Table 3: Number of Companies in Receipt Of Payments By Company Size Broken Down By County

HPSU Feasibility Grant (2014- 21.05.18): Number of Enterprise Ireland supported companies in receipt of payments under this grant by company size and county

Client County	Company Size	Total
Carlow	Less than 11	€17,665
	Between 11-49	€1,350
Carlow Total		€19,015
Cavan	Less than 11	€6,331
		€6,331
Clare	Between 11-49	€24,846
	Less than 11	€71,765
	Between 11-49	€10,750
Clare Total		€107,361
Cork	Over 250	€3,000
	Less than 11	€336,583
	Between 11-49	€162,790
Cork Total		€502,373
Donegal	Less than 11	€33,268
Donegal Total		€33,268
Dublin	Over 250	€9,735
	Between 11-49	€18,386
	Less than 11	€2,476,406
	Between 11-49	€593,319
Dublin Total		€3,097,845
Galway	Less than 11	€281,423
	Between 11-49	€60,301
Galway Total		€341,724
Kerry	Less than 11	€128,749
Kerry Total		€128,749
Kildare	Between 11-49	€3,467
	Less than 11	€130,825
	Between 11-49	€34,078
Kildare Total		€168,371

Questions - Written Answers

Client County	Company Size	Total
Kilkenny	Less than 11	€28,641
	Between 11-49	€15,000
Kilkenny Total		€43,641
Laois	Less than 11	€58,660
		€58,660
Laois Total		€58,660
Leitrim	Less than 11	€13,665
		€13,665
Leitrim Total		€13,665
Limerick	Less than 11	€85,246
	Between 11-49	€31,882
Limerick Total		€117,129
Longford	Less than 11	€19,450
	Between 11-49	€13,367
Longford Total		€32,817
Louth	Less than 11	€129,333
		€129,333
Louth Total		€129,333
Mayo	Less than 11	€158,262
	Between 11-49	€29,800
Mayo Total		€188,063
Meath	Less than 11	€60,926
	Between 11-49	€6,799
Meath Total		€67,725
Monaghan	Less than 11	€24,536
	Between 11-49	€7,492
Monaghan Total		€32,028
Offaly	Less than 11	€13,296
		€13,296
Offaly Total		€13,296
Roscommon	Less than 11	€7,974
		€7,974
Roscommon Total		€7,974
Sligo	Less than 11	€35,523
	Between 11-49	€9,031
Sligo Total		€44,554
Tipperary North	Less than 11	€27,174
		€27,174
Tipperary North Total		€27,174
Tipperary South	Less than 11	€10,317
		€10,317
Tipperary South Total		€10,317
Waterford	Less than 11	€43,259
	Between 11-49	€15,000
Waterford Total		€58,259
Westmeath	Less than 11	€46,536
		€46,536
Westmeath Total		€46,536
Wexford	Less than 11	€1,862
		€1,862
Wexford Total		€1,862
Wicklow	Between 11-49	€15,000
	Less than 11	€115,847

Client County	Company Size	Total
Wicklow Total		€130,847
Grand Total		€5,428,916

Enterprise Ireland Funding

102. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of applicants that received funding under Enterprise Ireland's commercial case feasibility support in each of the years 2014 to 2017 and to date in 2018 by county; the number that received funding by firm size of less than 10, 11 to 49, 50 to 249 and more than 250 employees; and the amount paid out by county and by firm size in tabular form. [22975/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The aim of the Commercialisation Fund is to improve the competitiveness of Irish industry. This is achieved through both the creation of technology based companies and through the development of licenses. The programme funds researchers in the higher education system to develop innovations at all stages of the commercial pipeline, to the point where they can be commercialised as new products, services and companies.

The Fund is available for projects that address a gap or need in the market by developing innovations that will ideally be ready for licensing to Irish industry, or may form the basis of a new start-within 5 years. Licenses developed may be accessed by companies in order to develop products, processes and services, in order to bring them to a point where they are ready for new domestic and international markets.

The Commercial Case Feasibility Support is a funding support which can be obtained by researchers, in partnership with their Technology Transfer or equivalent office, for a short Feasibility Project (up to 3 months) to scope and develop the commercial case for their innovation. Support is provided to assist the project team to:

- Perform Market analysis and validation
- Profile the competitor landscape
- Perform Patent landscaping and develop an IP strategy
- Investigate potential routes to exploitation to the economic benefit of Ireland
- Understand relevant regulatory issues or other barriers/hurdles to commercialisation
- Create a small demonstration or early prototype

The following table below outlines the number of projects that received funding under the Commercial Case Feasibility Support in each year by Institute and the associated payments in that year for 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018.

Institute	No. of Projects 2014	€ Paid 2014	No. of Projects 2015	€ Paid 2015	No. of Projects 2016	€ Paid 2016	No. of Projects 2017	€ Paid 2017	No. of projects 2018	€ Paid 2018
Dublin City University [DCU]	9	61,110	8	120,081	9	123,502	10	91,996	2	23,043
Dublin Institute of Technology	5	63,929	4	72,844	7	52,649	5	48,609	3	34,585

Questions - Written Answers

Institute	No. of Projects 2014	€ Paid 2014	No. of Projects 2015	€ Paid 2015	No. of Projects 2016	€ Paid 2016	No. of Projects 2017	€ Paid 2017	No. of projects 2018	€ Paid 2018
I.T. - Blanchardstown	0	9,665	1	3,935						
Institute of Technology Athlone	6	24,624	2	35,958	2	52,170	3	21,456	3	16,650
Institute of Technology Carlow	0	9,192	1	12,541	1	29,964	3	776		
Institute of Technology Cork	7	65,270	10	119,595	8	68,075	5	20,489	2	14,062
Institute of Technology Dundalk									1	10,500
Institute of Technology Galway-Mayo	2	32,024	2	14,979	0	18,911	2	6,920		
Institute of Technology Letterkenny					1	10,500			2	21,000
Institute of Technology Limerick	1	12,948	1	13,740	3	28,149	1	10,465		
Institute of Technology Sligo					1	13,263	1	10,500		
Institute of Technology Tallaght	1	10,950	0	10,080	2	27,720	1	4,444		
Institute of Technology Tralee	1	9,940	1	14,689	2	30,775				
Institute of Technology Waterford	14	99,184	4	43,110	1	2,392	1	20,522	3	24,973
National College of Art and Design	2	19,137	0	20,578	6	63,289	4	59,898		
National Institute of Bioprocessing Research and Training					1	15,000				
Royal College of Surgeons Ireland	5	49,546	2	25,278	1	3,873	1	10,241	1	9,450
Teagasc	0	8,651	1	3,707			1	10,350		
The National University of Ireland, Galway [NUIG]	13	66,190	7	107,390	6	161,114	14	56,547	3	24,538

Institute	No. of Projects 2014	€ Paid 2014	No. of Projects 2015	€ Paid 2015	No. of Projects 2016	€ Paid 2016	No. of Projects 2017	€ Paid 2017	No. of projects 2018	€ Paid 2018
The National University of Ireland, Maynooth [Maynooth University]	7	71,079	3	16,979	1	49,326	6	38,513	1	14,599
The University of Dublin, Trinity College [TCD]	11	89,895	6	80,162	2	15,000	7	112,855	7	49,255
Tyndall National Institute	2	23,923	0	4,140	1	19,950	1	8,494	2	17,675
University College Cork [UCC]	6	46,225	7	79,572	6	83,375	7	60,397	1	2,244
University College Dublin [UCD]	5	60,673	10	141,518	9	131,694	13	108,437	4	38,435
University of Limerick	12	126,536	3	37,468	5	82,665	11	118,032	1	1,850

***relates to payments from 01/01/2018-21/05/2018**

Enterprise Ireland Funding

103. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of applicants that received funding under Enterprise Ireland's agile innovation fund in each of the years 2014 to 2017 and to date in 2018 by county; the number that received funding by firm size of less than ten, 11 to 49, 50 to 249 and more than 250 employees; and the amount paid out by county and by firm size in tabular form. [22976/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Enterprise Ireland supports companies across Ireland to start, innovate and remain competitive in international markets, now and into the future. Enterprise Ireland's focus for 2018 is to help clients build on the strength of their 2017 performance by supporting them to innovate, be competitive and to diversify their global footprint - key attributes required to be resilient to economic shocks, such as Brexit.

Innovation is at the centre of Enterprise Ireland's strategy, Build Scale, Expand Reach 2017 – 2020. Innovation enables companies to develop tailored products and services for global customers. It also enables companies to develop efficient processes to support their competitive offering. This support includes grant funding for companies.

Enterprise Ireland provides grant support for companies to carry out in-house research and development, and also to harness the knowledge and expertise of the Higher Education Sector.

In November 2017, Enterprise Ireland launched a new fast-track Agile Innovation Fund to give companies rapid access to innovation funding. This fund supports companies in sectors with rapid design cycles to maintain their technology position. The benefits of this grant are that it allows for a very simple application process and delivers a very fast response from ap-

plication to approval. This fund allows companies to access up to 50% in support for product, process or service development projects up to a total cost of €300,000.

The Agile Innovation Fund has recently opened for applications for funding, which are currently being processed. To date nine companies have been approved funding under this initiative, although no payments have been made as yet. It is envisaged that grant approvals under this initiative will come online over the coming weeks.

Enterprise Ireland Funding

104. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of applicants that received funding under Enterprise Ireland's in-house research, development and innovation fund in each of the years 2014 to 2017 and to date in 2018 by county; the number that received funding by firm size of less than ten, 11 to 49, 50 to 249 and more than 250 employees; and the amount paid out by county and by firm size in tabular form. [22977/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Enterprise Ireland supports companies across Ireland to start, innovate and remain competitive in international markets, now and into the future. Enterprise Ireland's focus for 2018 is to help clients build on the strength of their 2017 performance by supporting them to innovate, be competitive and to diversify their global footprint - key attributes required to be resilient to economic shocks, such as Brexit.

Innovation is at the centre of Enterprise Ireland's strategy, Build Scale, Expand Reach 2017 – 2020. Innovation enables companies to develop tailored products and services for global customers. It also enables companies to develop efficient processes to support their competitive positioning in global markets.

The number of companies by county and size in receipt of payments under Enterprise Ireland's R&D fund is presented as follows.

Number of companies in receipt of Payments under Enterprise Ireland's in-house R&D Fund by County/Year

County	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2014 - 21.05.18 Total
Carlow				<5	<5	5
Cavan	<5	<5	<5	6	4	13
Clare	<5	8	6	8	8	16
Cork	7	17	19	16	20	45
Donegal	<5	<5	<5	<5	<5	6
Dublin	19	54	61	68	81	168
Galway	<5	9	7	7	6	22
Kerry	<5	<5	<5	<5	<5	7
Kildare	<5	<5	8	7	6	17
Kilkenny		<5	<5	<5	<5	6
Laois	<5	<5	<5	<5	<5	5
Leitrim					<5	<5
Limerick	<5	6	7	8	6	15
Longford				<5	<5	<5
Louth	<5	13	9	8	7	22

County	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2014 - 21.05.18 Total
Mayo		<5	<5	<5	<5	6
Meath		<5	<5	6	9	12
Monaghan	<5	5	<5	5	<5	8
Offaly			<5	<5	<5	<5
Overseas	<5	<5		<5	<5	<5
Roscommon				<5	<5	<5
Sligo		<5			<5	<5
Tipperary North	<5	<5		<5	<5	<5
Tipperary South		<5	<5	<5	<5	<5
Waterford	<5	<5	<5	<5	<5	<5
Westmeath		<5	<5	<5	<5	5
Wexford	<5	<5	<5	<5	<5	8
Wicklow	<5	9	7	<5	6	17
Grand Total	52	157	151	175	189	425

Number of companies in receipt of payments under Enterprise Ireland's in-house R&D Fund by size (2014 - 21.05.18)

Payments by company size	All counties Total
Over 250	22
50 -249	136
Between 11-49	221
Less than 11	46
Grand Total	425

Enterprise Ireland Funding

105. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of applicants that received funding under Enterprise Ireland's strategic consultancy grant in each of the years 2014 to 2017 and to date in 2018 by county; the number that received funding by firm size of less than ten, 11 to 49, 50 to 249 and more than 250 employees; and the amount paid out by county and by firm size in tabular form. [22978/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Enterprise Ireland offers a range of financial and non-financial supports to client companies to enable them to withstand the challenges and avail of the opportunities presented by the current economic climate. One of these supports is the Strategic Consultancy Grant, which is only available to SMEs, in line with EU State Aid guidelines. The Grant supports the hiring of a strategic consultant to help the company develop and/or implement strategic initiatives which will help them to compete in international markets.

The following tables present an overview of (1) the number of strategic consultancy (assignments) over the period on question; (2) the number of companies in receipt of payments by company size; and (3) the number of companies in receipt of payments by company size broken

down by county.

Table 1: Number of Strategic Consultancy (Assignments) Over the Period on Question

Strategic Consultancy (Assignment) No. of Company in receipt of Payments by County/ Year*

County	2018 (21.05.18)	2017	2016	2015	2014	2014 - 2018 (21.05.18) Total
Carlow		<5		<5		<5
Cavan	<5	<5	<5		<5	<5
Clare		<5		<5	<5	6
Cork	<5	5	9	<5	<5	20
Donegal	<5		<5			<5
Dublin	5	13	13	12	15	50
Galway		<5	<5	<5		7
Kerry			<5	<5	<5	<5
Kildare		<5		<5	<5	<5
Kilkenny		<5				<5
Laois		<5	<5	<5		<5
Leitrim				<5		<5
Limerick	<5	<5		<5	<5	9
Louth	<5	<5	<5	<5		8
Mayo		<5	<5	<5	<5	6
Meath		<5	<5		<5	5
Monaghan	<5	<5		<5	<5	6
Offaly			<5	<5		<5
Sligo		<5	<5	<5	<5	<5
Tipperary North			<5	<5		<5
Tipperary South					<5	<5
Waterford					<5	<5
Westmeath		<5	<5		<5	<5
Wexford		<5	<5			<5
Wicklow		6	<5	<5	<5	9
Grand Total	15	46	43	43	38	162

* In order to protect client confidentiality, exact numbers are not released for counties that have less than five approvals.

Table 2: Number of Companies in Receipt Of Payments By Company Size

Strategic Consultancy (Assignment) 2014 - 21.05.18 No. of Company in receipt of Payments by company employment (All counties)

Company size	Total
over 50	54
less than 11	4
Between 11-49	104
Grand Total	162

Table 3: Number of Companies In Receipt Of Payments By Company Size Broken Down By County

Value of payments by County/Firm Size

Client County	company size	Total
Carlow	Over 50	€19,500
	Between 50 - 249	€11,650
Carlow Total		€31,150
Cavan	Over 50	€29,250
	Between 50 - 249	€17,000
Cavan Total		€46,250
Clare	Between 50 - 249	€58,831
Clare Total		€58,831
Cork	Over 50	€54,975
	Between 50 - 249	€109,436
Cork Total		€164,411
Donegal	Over 50	€12,500
	Between 50 - 249	€5,142
Donegal Total		€17,642
Dublin	Over 50	€151,013
	less than 11	€19,000
	Between 50 - 249	€364,092
Dublin total		€534,105
Galway	Over 50	€12,125
	Between 50 - 249	€66,313
Galway Total		€78,438
Kerry	Over 50	€15,425
	Between 50 - 249	€1,972
Kerry Total		€17,397
Kildare	Between 50 - 249	€13,791
Kildare Total		€13,791
Kilkenny	Between 50 - 249	€7,423
Kilkenny Total		€7,423
Laois	Between 50 - 249	€41,975
Laois Total		€41,975
Leitrim	Between 50 - 249	€12,875
Leitrim Total		€12,875
Limerick	Over 50	€16,450
	less than 11	€15,000
	Between 50 - 249	€49,100
Limerick Total		€80,550
Louth	Over 50	€37,204
	Between 50 - 249	€49,675
Louth Total		€86,879
Mayo	Over 50	€47,050
	Between 50 - 249	€19,610
Mayo Total		€66,660
Meath	Over 50	€9,000
	Between 50 - 249	€42,401

Questions - Written Answers

Client County	company size	Total
Meath Total		€51,401
Monaghan	Over 50	€47,425
	less than 11	€2,925
	Between 50 - 249	€35,950
Monaghan Total		€86,300
Offaly	Between 50 - 249	€14,350
Offaly Total		€14,350
Sligo	Over 50	€12,386
	Between 50 - 249	€21,672
Sligo Total		€34,058
Tipperary North	Over 50	€39,650
Tipperary North Total		€39,650
Tipperary South	Between 50 - 249	€12,500
Tipperary South Total		€12,500
Waterford	Between 50 - 249	€10,328
Waterford Total		€10,328
Westmeath	Over 50	€17,399
	Between 50 - 249	€12,771
Westmeath Total		€30,170
Wexford	Between 50 - 249	€17,400
Wexford Total		€17,400
Wicklow	Over 50	€28,950
	Between 50 - 249	€72,359
Wicklow Total		€101,309
Grand Total		€1,655,843

Enterprise Ireland Funding

106. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of applicants that received funding under Enterprise Ireland's market discovery fund in each of the years 2014 to 2017 and to date in 2018 by county; the number that received funding by firm size of less than ten, 11 to 49, 50 to 249 and more than 250 employees; and the amount paid out by county and by firm size in tabular form. [22979/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The best way for Irish companies to withstand current global economic challenges is by diversifying their export footprint. One of the new supports that Enterprise Ireland has introduced to encourage companies to enter new markets is the Market Discovery Fund.

Launched in January 2018, the Market Discovery Fund aims to encourage companies to expand into new markets by helping with the costs of researching viable and sustainable market entry strategies.

The Fund provides support towards both internal and external costs incurred by companies when researching new markets for products and services. Eligible companies can receive support when they are looking at a new geographic market for an existing product/service, or when looking at exporting a new product/service to a market that they already do business in.

The Market Discovery Fund is available across three levels:

- Level 1: Grant up to €35K
- Level 2: Grant greater than €35K but less than €75K
- Level 3: Grant greater than €75K but less than €150K

The maximum funding is 50% of eligible expenditure up to a maximum grant of €150,000. Eligible expenditure includes, but is not limited to, salary support, consultancy costs, trade fair costs and foreign travel.

The Market Discovery Fund was launched in 2018, and has only been open for applications for a number of weeks. It is not possible, therefore, to provide data prior to this year. To date, fifteen Market Discovery Grants have been approved. As the fund is at such a nascent stage it is not yet possible to report on the geographic spread or take-up among different sized companies.

Unified Patent Court

107. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the timeframe for holding a referendum on the implementation of the unified patent court; the impact Brexit will have on its implementation; if the agreement will require renegotiation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23051/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The timing of any referendum is a matter for Government and no date has been set for a referendum on Ireland's participation in the international Agreement on a Unified Patent Court, which has yet to come into force. To come into force the Agreement must be ratified by at least 13 contracting Member States, including France, the United Kingdom and Germany. To date 16 contracting Member States, including France and the UK, have ratified the Agreement but the German ratification process is delayed pending the outcome of a constitutional challenge there. While the issue of the UK's continued participation in the UPC post Brexit remains to be determined, the priority is to bring the UPC into force. Any discussion of a renegotiation of the Agreement at this stage is premature.

Trade Strategy

108. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the degree to which her Department has made alternative proposals in anticipation of Brexit with particular reference to the need to establish contact with new trading partners; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23073/18]

110. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of countries with particular reference to new markets with which she continues to be in contact in order to generate new business; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23075/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 108 and 110 together.

Promoting diversified export markets in light of the potential impacts of Brexit is a key priority for my Department. This includes markets that are growing and have scale as well as markets where we are already well established but with potential for further growth.

Through the Government's Trade Strategy, 'Ireland Connected: Trading and Investing in a Dynamic World', we aim by 2020 to increase indigenous exports by Enterprise Ireland supported companies, including food, to reach €26 billion and secure 900 new foreign direct investments. Specifically, in relation to Brexit, there is a clear priority to intensify and diversify the export base with a target of 80% of indigenous export growth to 2020 to be outside of the UK market and maintain exports of at least €7.5 billion to the UK. More recently, Government's Enterprise 2025 Renewed strategy published in March 2018 sets out targets for export growth and diversification within the indigenous exporting base, with ambitions to increase exports as a percentage of total sales of Irish owned companies from 52 percent to between 55 and 60 percent by 2020 and increase Enterprise Ireland client exports beyond UK markets from €14.1 billion to €17.4 billion by 2020. The strategy also targets a 50 percent increase in the number of FDI investments from non-US markets by 2020.

In 2017, Enterprise Ireland launched its Eurozone Strategy as a key element of its supports to help companies diversify their export markets. In particular, it aims to increase exports to the Eurozone by €2bn per annum by 2020, equivalent to 50 percent increase. This would represent one of the most significant shifts in Enterprise Ireland supported client exports into the Eurozone and is particularly important in the context of Brexit.

The Government's Trade Strategy supports an extensive programme of Ministerial-led trade missions, as part of a major drive towards market diversification. Enterprise Ireland delivered an impressive programme of international trade events in 2017, giving Irish companies the opportunity to meet with potential buyers and network with key influencers in countries around the world. In total, 57 internationally focused trade events were organised by Enterprise Ireland in 2017 including ministerial-led trade missions to Canada, Singapore, Japan, the United Arab Emirates, Oman and a major trade programme as part of the State visit to Australia and New Zealand.

In relation to 2018, the programme of ministerial-led trade missions and events has been finalised and published by Enterprise Ireland, with 70 Ministerial-led trade visits planned to 33 different markets. Several events have already taken place, including ministerial-led missions to the USA in January, and Mexico and Russia in February. Missions to EU markets will be a priority focus for the 2018 programme, together with missions to key markets where the EU has or is negotiating free trade agreements. As part of the St. Patrick's Day "Promote Ireland" Programmes, Ministerial visits around the world were organised to ensure that we use this exposure to maximise the promotion of Ireland's trade, tourism and investment interests. The Government has signalled its ambition to further enhance its overseas networks through the Global Footprint 2025 initiative, which aims to double the impact of our overseas presence through an increase in our enterprise agency global footprint and Embassy network.

As well as the global efforts supported by our agencies, key to our success has been our commitment to trade liberalisation in order to open new markets for our indigenous sectors. The EU has successfully concluded a number of important trade agreements with trading partners and is in the process of negotiating or upgrading its agreements with many more. These existing EU Agreements and new trade deals will continue to be very important for Ireland. With a small domestic market, further expansion in other markets is essential to our continued economic growth. In this regard Ireland will continue to support the EU's ambitious programme of negotiating new Free Trade Agreements, opening new markets for Irish companies and increasing export and investment opportunities.

Most recently, the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic Trade Agreement (CETA) entered into force provisionally from the 21st September 2017. Irish companies may now take advantage of the all-important provisions of CETA including the elimination of tariffs on almost

all key exports, access to the Canadian procurement market, the easing of regulatory barriers and more transparent rules for market access. CETA presents new opportunities for Irish business and professionals to work and provide services in Canada.

On the 21st April 2018, the EU and Mexico reached an agreement in principle on a new trade agreement that will be part of the broader Global Agreement. The Agreement will provide a platform to increase Irish exports to Mexico, the current total value is just over €2 billion per year with total imports of nearly half a billion euros per year. It will further remove industrial tariffs and important agricultural tariffs. This will be significant for Ireland's important Agri-food sector especially for dairy, pork and poultry products. Ireland is a significant exporter to Mexico of powdered milk and milk derivatives but there are currently significant barriers both to increasing powdered milk exports and to commencing exports of fresh dairy produce. There are many exciting opportunities in Mexico for Irish businesses including manufacturing, automotive, engineering, telecommunications, ICT, aerospace, software and service and manufacturing technology. The Agreement will also open up public procurement markets to Irish businesses and remove technical barriers to trade which will reduce the costs of entry to the Mexican market.

The EU is continuing its negotiations with Mercosur and recently announced the successful conclusion of negotiations of the EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement. The agri-food sector, in particular will see benefits from access to Japan's highly valuable export market, with improved access for beef, pork, cheese and processed agricultural products. In addition the EU's trade deal with Singapore is hoped to come into force by the end of the year.

During his September 2017 State of the Union address, the President of the European Parliament, Jean-Claude Juncker, proposed opening trade negotiations with Australia and New Zealand. This month, the Trade Council of Ministers adopted a decision authorising the opening of negotiations on free trade agreements with Australia and New Zealand, as well as adoption of the respective negotiating directives for the Commission.

Ireland will continue to support the EU's ambitious programme of negotiating new FTA's giving Irish firms expanded market access and a predictable trading environment in third countries. My Department has recently commissioned a study to examine the economic opportunities and impacts for Ireland arising from FTAs, both currently in place and in negotiation. The objective is to deepen our understanding of how Ireland can best take advantage of these opportunities, and ensure that our businesses are prepared to access new markets.

Enterprise Support Services Provision

109. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of new enterprises seeking and obtaining the support of her Department both in the manufacturing and services sectors; the extent to which she expects these contacts to mature into the creation of new jobs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23074/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department, through its enterprise agencies is committed to supporting companies in urban and rural areas to start, innovate and remain competitive in international markets, now and into the future. Reflecting the strength of the Irish economy and of global markets in 2017, Enterprise Ireland client companies reported strong employment performance. Enterprise Ireland's 2017 employment survey reported:

- the highest employment in the history of the agency with 209,338 people employed in

Enterprise Ireland supported companies;

- the highest net job creation in the history of the agency which saw 10,309 new jobs created after losses are taken into account;

- the lowest number of job losses since 1998; and

- employment growth across all regions, counties and sectors.

Enterprise Ireland supports companies in both the manufacturing and internationally traded services sectors. In 2017 Enterprise Ireland supported 90 High Potential Start Ups and 91 new start-ups under the Competitive Start Fund. 374 entrepreneurs also participated on entrepreneurship programmes. As this cohort of entrepreneurs start and scale their businesses, new jobs will be created that will assist in contributing to the agency's 2020 strategic ambition of creating 60,000 new jobs.

In the period from 1st January 2017 to 30th April 2018 the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) approved 360 Priming projects. The number of priming grants is representative of the number of new enterprises established. These projects have the potential to create just over 1,400 jobs over the next three years.

Question No. 110 answered with Question No. 108.

Skills Development

111. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the extent to which her Department remains in contact with second and third level educational institutions with a view to ensuring an adequate supply of suitably qualified staff; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23076/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department, through the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN), continuously monitors and advises the Government on future skills requirements and associated labour market issues that impact on the national potential for employment growth.

The EGFSN is an independent, non-statutory body, which includes representatives from the business community, trade unions, and a small number of Government Departments and agencies. My Department provides the Group with research and Secretariat support.

The education and training sector is represented on the EGFSN through the membership of the Department of Education and Skills, the Higher Education Authority, and SOLAS, Ireland's Further Education and Training Authority.

As required, the group also engages with education and training providers, in the context of individual projects analysing the skills needs of particular sectors or occupations, and in the development of associated measures to address identified needs. On completion of individual projects, the Group also liaises with the education and training sector on its findings and recommendations.

Furthermore, my Department, through the EGFSN Secretariat, also meets periodically with education and training providers, either through bilateral meetings or in the context of wider sector specific meetings, to discuss skills development issues, initiatives, as well as the progress of actions or initiatives recommended by the EGFSN.

Enterprise Data

112. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the degree to which innovation remains a feature in the generation of business and new enterprise at home and abroad with particular reference to access to new markets; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23077/18]

114. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the degree to which innovation remains part of her programme to assist business and new enterprises seeking to establish themselves on EU or non-EU markets; if particular issues have arisen in this regard; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23079/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 112 and 114 together.

Enterprise Ireland, an Agency of my Department, supports companies in urban and rural areas to start, innovate and remain competitive in international markets, now and into the future. Enterprise Ireland's focus for 2018 is to help clients with global ambition to build on the strength of their 2017 performance by supporting them to innovate, be competitive and to diversify their global footprint. Innovation is at the centre of Enterprise Ireland's strategy, Build Scale, Expand Reach 2017 – 2020 and is critical for companies seeking to diversify their global footprint, both within and outside of the EU market.

Innovation is essential for all companies, irrespective of their stage of development. It enables companies to improve their competitiveness both at home and internationally, to develop tailored products and services for global customers and to win market share.

Enterprise Ireland is working with its clients to drive innovation activity via a number of supports that enable companies to:

- Diagnose their innovation readiness;
- Finance in-house R and D projects;
- Finance collaboration with research expertise within the Higher Education Sector and with companies; and
- Maximise the funding they can receive from the European Union.

To support these activities, in 2017 Enterprise Ireland:

- Approved 99 R and D projects to clients over €100,000;
- Approved funding for 436 industry innovation projects at Technology Gateways throughout the country; and
- Provided financial support for 1,065 collaborative innovations between industry and higher education institutes across the country.

Innovation is a key attribute required to be resilient to economic shocks, such as Brexit.

To drive the building of resilience to such shocks, Enterprise Ireland has put an increased emphasis on market diversification - driving innovation and competitiveness, which are key areas for companies with global ambition. In delivering on this, new supports have been introduced, others streamlined, and a Global Ambition campaign featuring the importance of innovation was launched. Enterprise Ireland has also recently launched a new fast-track Agile In-

novation Fund which gives companies rapid access to innovation funding to enhance processes and adapt products for new markets.

Enterprise Ireland will continue to work with companies with global ambition, both within and outside the EU to communicate the importance of innovation, ensure that companies are aware of the available RDI supports and that available supports are streamlined and meeting the needs of companies. Among the core objectives of Enterprise Ireland is to help companies increase sales and exports. In 2016 exports by Enterprise Ireland clients had a total value of €21.6 billion, up 6% on 2015 levels. In terms of research and innovation, Enterprise Ireland's key measure of success is investment by companies in R and D. Enterprise Ireland Clients invested €916 million in R and D in 2016 and EI's goal is to raise this to €1.25 billion per annum by 2020.

Brexit Supports

113. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the extent to which she remains satisfied with the availability of grant aid or other supports to assist business and enterprise here facing the threat arising from Brexit; if further innovation is needed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23078/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department is carrying out extensive work to prepare for all Brexit eventualities. Informed by detailed research, my Department has been putting in place a package of measures that will allow us to respond to the needs of businesses including the Brexit Loan Scheme which was launched in April 2018 and which will provide affordable working capital financing to eligible businesses that are either currently impacted by Brexit or will be in the future.

My officials are also examining policy proposals for a new longer-term Business Investment Loan Scheme to support businesses to invest strategically for a post-Brexit environment and a new Business Finance Advisory Hub service which would focus on business development.

In November 2017, the then Tánaiste met with Commissioner Vestager, the European Commissioner for Competition who has responsibility for EU State aid policy to discuss, amongst other things, the impact of Brexit on Irish businesses. An outcome from this meeting was the establishment of a Technical Working Group comprising representatives from DG Competition, the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, Enterprise Ireland and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. The objective of the Group is to scope and design schemes to support enterprises impacted by Brexit in line with State Aid rules. An outcome of the Technical Working Group discussions has been the extension of the Irish Rescue and Restructuring (R and R) scheme to include temporary restructuring aid for enterprises facing acute liquid needs. This provides a further 10 million euro of State support to those companies experiencing acute liquidity needs and is in addition to the original 10m euro announced in November 2017 under the R and R scheme. Under R and R guidelines, the temporary restructuring element is in the form of loans repayable over a maximum period of 18 month. However, restructuring aid under this scheme is in the form of direct grants or equity support.

The Agencies of my Department are at the forefront in working with firms to ensure they are equipped to deal with Brexit and to enhance their performances in an increasingly competitive global trading environment through lean programmes, skills development and reducing business costs.

Enterprise Ireland (EI) has launched the 'Brexit SME Scorecard', an interactive online tool

which can be used by all Irish companies to self-assess their exposure to Brexit. EI is also offering a 'Be Prepared Grant' of up to €5,000 to support clients to develop a Brexit Action Plan and it continues to support clients to improve their competitiveness, acquire new markets and enhance management skills.

In addition, EI has a number of other grants in place to support business. The Strategic Consultancy Grant supports the hiring of an outside consultant to assist the company in devising and/or implementing strategic initiatives aimed at improving business function and resilience. It is designed to facilitate business growth as the consultants can act as coach, mentor, facilitator, analyst, negotiator and/or operator for the company. Up to 50% of the costs incurred in hiring a consultant are available up to a maximum grant amount of €35,000.

The Market Discovery Fund provides support to companies to assist them in researching the viability of exporting an existing product/service into a new geographic market, or introducing a new product/service into an existing market. The maximum funding is 50% of eligible expenditure up to a maximum grant of €150,000.

The Agile Innovation Fund is an RD and I grant aimed at clients in sectors with rapid design cycles. It has been developed to support product, service and process innovation to enhance the competitive advantage of Irish companies. The application process is simple and quick, with a short timeframe between application and approval.

Enterprise Ireland is continuing to work with companies to help them to become more innovative. It has rolled out a number of Brexit Advisory Clinics across the country which helps companies to examine their exposure to Brexit and develop effective strategies to mitigate against that exposure. These Clinics are open to both EI clients and non-clients and are delivered free of charge. The next Clinic will take place in Dublin on June 21st at the Aviva Stadium. Topics to be covered include Financial and Currency Management, Strategic Sourcing and Customs, Transport and Logistics, Intellectual Property, Movement of People and Markets.

Enterprise Ireland has also introduced the Brexit: Act On initiative. Under the initiative an independent consultant will come to a company for two half day sessions. The consultant helps companies to decide on specific actions that they can implement over a short period to enable them to address the risks and avail of the opportunities caused by Brexit.

The Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) are organising workshops, seminars and training to assist companies to better understand the challenges of Brexit and have a range of supports to help clients to respond to those challenges, to become more competitive and to source new markets.

Given its experience in promoting and strengthening North-South trade, InterTrade Ireland (ITI), is especially well-positioned to assist businesses in Ireland address the particular commercial challenges that Brexit may present for future cross-border commerce. That is why my Department has provided additional funding to ITI both last year and also this year, to allow it to undertake a range of initiatives aimed at better preparing Irish SMEs for the UK's withdrawal from the European Union. This work includes the provision of factual advice, information materials and supports for capability building and the provision of other specialist expertise for companies. Major flagship awareness events were held last year in both Belfast and Dublin, attracting several hundred companies each. In addition, an extensive series of information events have been held in smaller centres on both sides of the border. Such events have been organised by ITI in Lisburn, Mullingar, Duleek and Cootehill, and this month alone there have been events in Cork and Sligo.

A key part of InterTrade Ireland's Brexit work is the provision for SMEs of a Brexit 'Start to Plan' readiness voucher scheme, which enables companies to purchase specialist advice in

areas such as customs, tax, tariff and non-tariff barriers, legal and labour mobility issues. These are worth €2,000 to each to the companies.

In addition, my Department is funding a research project being undertaken for InterTrade Ireland by the ESRI. The first phase of this research was aimed at improving our understanding of the impact of different trade and tariff regimes which might be imposed following Brexit. The second phase focused on the patterns of cross-border trade on the island of Ireland, and on the role of supply chain links. The next phase of ITI's research will consist of two further topics being worked on simultaneously: Cross-border trade in service and the capacity of businesses to absorb the costs of Brexit.

Question No. 114 answered with Question No. 112.

Brexit Issues

115. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the extent to which she remains satisfied that the growth of business and enterprise here continues to be soundly based in the face of threats in the aftermath of Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23080/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Since the first publication of the Action Plan for Jobs in 2012, Ireland's economy has performed stronger than would have been thought possible at that time. The unemployment rate has reduced from a high of almost 16 percent to 5.9 percent in April 2018. Our total exports are at an all time high. The performance of our indigenous exports remains robust and on target to achieve €26 billion by 2020 with increased diversification across markets. Nevertheless, we cannot assume that past performance will continue - particularly as we face a changed environment in the aftermath of Brexit.

My Department recently published Enterprise 2025 Renewed. This involved reviewing our enterprise policies to ensure that our policy priorities remain robust in today's uncertain environment. Enterprise 2025 Renewed reaffirms our policy focus on export-led growth, underpinned by innovation, talent and investments in place-making.

In the face of global challenges, Enterprise 2025 Renewed places a greater emphasis on five main areas:

- supporting the development of Irish owned enterprises so that they are a driver of growth over the period to 2025;
- placing a spotlight on innovation, skills and on leveraging Ireland's strengths in technologies - the fundamentals that underpin competitiveness and enhanced productivity;
- stimulating greater levels of clustering that takes advantage of the distinctive enterprise mix we have here in Ireland including foreign and Irish owned and optimises spillovers;
- developing Ireland's relationships with new like-minded members within the EU, managing our reputation in the US in particular, as well as more widely; and raising Ireland's visibility in overseas markets where we are less well known; and
- realising the potential of all of our regions.

While we cannot predict the impact of Brexit with any certainty, my Department and enterprise development agencies are focused on deepening the resilience of the enterprise base.

We are building from a position of strength, notwithstanding the fact that there may be some vulnerabilities in our enterprise base.

I am ensuring that my Department and its agencies continue to work relentlessly with enterprises, to strengthen sectoral and firm level resilience as a sound basis for future growth. Building Stronger Business – responding to Brexit by competing, innovating and trading, published in November 2017, sets out work underway and planned, in response to Brexit, including supports available to companies to help them prepare for Brexit. Furthermore, the Action Plan for Jobs 2018 sets out actions aimed at solidifying progress made since the APJ was originally published in 2012, and at deepening resilience. A key focus in Action Plan for Jobs 2018 is to support businesses in accessing the finance needed to grow their businesses and address the challenges caused by Brexit.

I am confident that we have a strong basis from which to grow. While we cannot influence what happens externally, we can ensure that Ireland's future prospects are strengthened by taking the right actions now across Government to ensure that: Ireland remains internationally competitive; that our enterprises deepen resilience through investments in skills and innovation; and that we continue to create an environment that is supportive of business investment and growth.

Economic Competitiveness

116. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the degree to which she remains satisfied that adequate incentives, supports, modern technology and innovative services remain available to the indigenous business sector here having regard to increased competition in the market place; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23081/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department, through its enterprise agencies is committed to supporting business to understand and respond to technological change and to incentivising indigenous businesses and entrepreneurs to start, innovate and remain competitive in international markets, now and into the future.

Enterprise Ireland's focus for 2018 is to help clients build on the strength of their 2017 performance by supporting them to innovate, be competitive and to diversify their global footprint - key attributes required to be resilient to economic shocks, such as those emerging from any kind of Brexit.

To build resilience, Enterprise Ireland has put an increased emphasis on market diversification, driving innovation and competitiveness. In delivering on this, new supports have been introduced, others streamlined, and a Global Ambition campaign launched, for example:

Market Diversification: Enterprise Ireland is actively working with companies with global ambition to internationalise, and in doing so, diversify their global footprint. This is critical for long term business growth. To support this, Enterprise Ireland recently launched a new Market Discovery Fund to incentivise companies to research viable and sustainable market entry strategies in new geographic markets. The agency is also increasing its trade mission programme in 2018.

Innovation is essential for companies to be competitive internationally and to win market share. Enterprise Ireland is working with its clients to drive innovation activity via a number of supports that enable companies to:

- Diagnose their innovation readiness;
- Finance in-house R&D projects; and
- Finance collaboration with research expertise within the Higher Education Sector and with companies.

In addition, Enterprise Ireland recently launched a new fast-track Agile Innovation Fund which gives companies rapid access to innovation funding to enhance processes and adapt products for new markets.

Competitiveness is critical for companies to scale and internationalise. Enterprise Ireland is working with companies to identify their competitiveness challenges and to support companies by providing access to a range of competitiveness building tools, including the Company Competitiveness Health Check, the Lean Offer and Green Offer. Later in 2018, Enterprise will be announcing a new enhanced offering in this space.

Foreign Direct Investment

117. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the degree to which she remains satisfied that Ireland remains an attractive location to do business; her views on whether streamlining of the planning service is required in the aftermath of the loss of a major enterprise; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23082/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Ireland operates in an intensely competitive global environment for the attraction of business investment and talent. Our Irish owned enterprises compete on the international stage and face unprecedented challenges as they face the implications of Brexit and need to diversify to other export markets. In this context it is crucially important that we, as a Government, continue to focus on improving Ireland's relative competitiveness and attractiveness as a location in which to do business – both for foreign and Irish owned enterprises.

Ireland has many strengths when it comes to attracting business investment, including our membership of the EU and the fact that we are an English-speaking nation. For all enterprises, access to a highly skilled workforce, our supportive regulatory environment and an eco-system that stimulates and supports innovation are critical elements of an attractive location; as is access to world class infrastructures and services. Enterprise 2025 Renewed places a strong emphasis on driving export-led growth, underpinned by innovation, talent and placemaking. As Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, my objective is to create the best possible environment for enterprise, entrepreneurship, innovation and investment across all regions.

In today's ever changing global environment, we cannot afford to be complacent. We need to anticipate and respond to circumstances that may impact negatively on our competitiveness or on how we may be perceived internationally. In relation to the Deputy's query, it is important first of all to note that Ireland has a robust set of laws and regulations which govern planning and environmental considerations, encourages consultation and allows for appeal. A planning system that balances the ambitions of development against the valid interests and concerns of local populations is an appropriate and necessary structure which we should maintain and be confident in. Nevertheless, there is room for improvement in relation to streamlining the planning service - particularly in regard to the speed at which planning decisions are taken.

The Government is currently considering a package of measures to streamline the judicial review of strategic infrastructure projects in order to provide greater certainty on the timeframe

for decisions on planning and other consent processes. The measures will build on the accelerated, one-stage planning process for strategic infrastructure projects which is already operated by An Bord Pleanála.

Providing certainty to potential investors as to the timeframe within which they can expect a decision should ensure that Ireland's planning system remains a key part of our overall attractiveness as a good place in which to do business.

Furthermore, Project Ireland 2040 and the development of the associated Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, should provide a more coherent and joined-up policy context for planning decisions. This should better facilitate both developers and planning authorities to make consistent and appropriate planning decisions which are aligned with our national and regional policy objectives.

Clinical Indemnity Scheme

118. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the amount of funds estimated to be required to settle cases (details supplied); if the Health Service Executive is required to make further contributions greater than 1% of costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23057/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The State Claims Agency has a statutory responsibility to manage claims under the Clinical Indemnity Scheme and to ensure that the State's liability and associated legal and other expenses are contained at the lowest achievable level.

There has only been one case settled by the State Claims Agency to date relating to the issue. In that case liability rested with and settlement costs were made by a third party, with a contribution by the State Claims Agency.

The State Claims Agency has advised my Department that given the small number of other cases involved that the Agency is unable to supply the information requested concerning the monetary contributions that may be made to settle these cases.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

119. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) has been refused Versatis patches in view of the person's exceptional medical conditions; the eligibility criteria in order to be prescribed same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22893/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Medicines play a vital role in improving the health of Irish patients. Securing access to existing and new and innovative medicines is a key health service objective. However, the challenge is to do this in a safe and sustainable manner. Treatment must be appropriate and proportionate and clinical decision-making, such as prescribing, should be based on both patient needs and sound medical evidence.

Lidocaine 5% medicated plasters are licensed for localised relief of post-shingles pain in adults. This is the patch's only licensed use in Ireland. It has been reimbursed in the community drugs schemes since 2010.

Clinical concern arose when, from 2012 on, usage increased significantly, to the point where

more plasters were being used in Ireland than in the entire UK National Health Service. In such situations, it is important and appropriate for clinicians to review usage and, in 2016, the HSE Medicines Management Programme (MMP) reviewed the use of the plasters. The review estimated that only 5-10% of prescribing was for the licensed indication.

From September 2017, following the clinical review, the HSE introduced a new reimbursement approval system for the patches, to support appropriate use and patient care. Under these arrangements, the patient's GP or consultant applies to the MMP for reimbursement approval on behalf of the patient. If an application is refused, the clinician may submit an appeal, making a clear clinical case for the patient, to the MMP. Information for patients and practitioners is on the HSE MMP website at www.hse.ie/yourmedicines.

The outcome of an application or an appeal for reimbursement of lidocaine patches is a matter between the MMP and the treating clinician. The Deputy will appreciate that, as Minister for Health, I cannot intervene in individual cases.

The decision to introduce a new reimbursement approval process is a matter for the HSE. However, I fully support the objectives of the HSE Medicines Management Programme.

Hospital Waiting Lists

120. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the status of the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22895/18]

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

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

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

Medical Card Eligibility

121. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) will qualify for a medical card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22904/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In accordance with the provisions of the Health Act 1970 (as amended), eligibility for a medical card is determined by the HSE. I am informed by the HSE that they have not received an application from the person concerned and I would advise that one should be submitted in order for the persons eligibility to be assessed.

It should be noted that the HSE's Expert Group on Medical Need and Medical Card Eligibility examined the issue of awarding medical cards on the basis of illness and concluded that it

was not feasible, desirable, nor ethically justifiable to list medical conditions in priority order for medical card eligibility. The Expert Group also concluded that a person's means should remain the main qualifier for a medical card. This position remains unchanged.

Therefore, medical card provision is based on financial assessment. The Act obliges the HSE to assess whether a person is unable, without due hardship, to arrange general practitioner services for himself or herself and his or her family, having regard to his or her overall financial position and reasonable expenditure and every application must be assessed on that basis. Where the applicant's income is within the income guidelines, a medical card or GP visit card will be awarded.

Nevertheless, every effort is made by the HSE, within the framework of the legislation, to support applicants in applying for a medical card and, in particular, to take full account of the difficult circumstances in the case of applicants who may be in excess of the income guidelines. In certain circumstances, the HSE may exercise discretion and grant a medical card, even though an applicant exceeds his or her income threshold, where he or she faces difficult financial circumstances, such as extra costs arising from an illness. Social and medical issues are considered when determining whether undue hardship exists for an individual accessing general practitioner or other medical services. The HSE affords applicants the opportunity to furnish supporting information documentation to fully take account of all the relevant circumstances that may benefit them in the assessment, including medical evidence of cost and necessary expenses.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme

122. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if there are planned changes to the fair deal scheme; if so, the details of same; if the case of a person (details supplied) will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22907/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): A review of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS) was published in July 2015. Arising out of the review, a recommendation was made to examine the treatment of business and farm assets for the purposes of the financial assessment element of the scheme. The Programme for a Partnership Government also committed to reviewing the NHSS to remove any discrimination against small businesses and family farms.

At present, the capital value of an individual's principal private residence is only included in the financial assessment for the first three years of their time in care. This is known as the three year cap. This cap does not apply to productive assets such as farms and businesses except in cases of sudden illness or disability where specific conditions are met.

It is proposed to amend the scheme to treat farm and business assets in the same manner as the principal private residence where a family successor commits to working the farm or business, i.e. to cap contributions at three years.

The Department of Health has been examining the potential for changes to the treatment of business and farm assets under the Nursing Homes Support Scheme. Any changes to the scheme, if approved by Government, will require amendment of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme Act 2009.

A Memorandum for Government setting out the details of the proposed policy change and seeking Government approval to draft the General Scheme of a bill to amend the Nursing Homes Support Scheme Act 2009 has been prepared and will shortly be circulated to other

Government Departments for observations.

Disabilities Assessments

123. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the new standard operating procedure in the assessment of need process used by the HSE; if he was consulted regarding these changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22908/18]

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 Assessments

124. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the concerns expressed by organisations (details supplied) regarding the new standard operating procedure in the assessment of need process; if he will request the HSE to review this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22909/18]

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

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

Health Services Provision

125. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health if further consideration has been given to the development of a service (details supplied) in County Donegal in view of the increasing requests for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22912/18]

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

HSE Reviews

126. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if the internal review into the deaths

of 74 University Hospital Limerick patients who tested positive for CPE has been published; and if he will provide a copy of same. [22913/18]

127. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health when an independent external review by a senior microbiologist from the UK into the deaths of 74 University Hospital Limerick patients who tested positive for CPE will be completed. [22914/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 126 and 127 together.

My understanding is that both of these particular reports were commissioned by the University of Limerick Hospital Group (ULHG) and I have referred your questions to the HSE for direct response to the Deputy.

I wish, however to assure the Deputy that I take the risks of healthcare associated infections very seriously. In this regard I launched Ireland's National Action Plan on AMR last October and declared CPE as a public health emergency and it continues to be managed as such.

Health Services Provision

128. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the number of children waiting to see their community ophthalmic physician in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22936/18]

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

Health Services Provision

129. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the number of children waiting to see their community ophthalmic physician in County Laois; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22937/18]

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

Health Services Provision

130. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health his plans to address the numbers of children waiting to be seen by their community ophthalmic physician; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22938/18]

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

Hospital Staff Recruitment

131. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health the status of the appointment of a second consultant to a service (details supplied); when a clinic will be reinstated at a

hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22939/18]

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

Hospital Acquired Infections

132. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the funding allocated in 2018 to provide for the full implementation of national policies and guidelines in regard to antimicrobial resistance and healthcare acquired infections; and if the funding has been ring-fenced for that purpose. [22942/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The prevention and control of healthcare associated infections (HCAIs) and Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) is a significant patient safety and public health priority for the Department of Health.

On 25 October last, Ireland's National Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance 2017-2020 (iNAP) was launched by myself and Minister Michael Creed, Minister for Agriculture, Food & the Marine. This Plan was developed in line with the WHO Global Action Plan on AMR (2015). The iNAP activities are prioritised and being implemented across the duration of the Plan.

In response to the emergence of virulent antibiotic-resistant bacterial strains, in particular CPE or CRE, commonly known as 'superbugs', I convened the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) in October 2017, as a public health response to the CPE superbug. CPE has been declared as a public health emergency. The NPHE is chaired by the Chief Medical Officer. It held its first meeting on 02 November 2017 and continues to meet regularly.

The actions arising from iNAP and identified through the NPHE on CPE are being progressed. The Department held back dedicated funding for 2018 and the HSE is prioritising work programmes for this funding in line with CPE risk, which also addresses strategic interventions in iNAP. To date the Department has provided funding to expand the national team on HCAI/AMR, and fund prioritised laboratory posts. This provides a multi-disciplinary team and dedicated implementation leads to tackle the challenge of AMR and CPE in particular across the HSE.

Narcolepsy Issues

133. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to a judgment (details supplied) of the European Court of Justice; and if he will direct the State Claims Agency to cease its defence of cases for damage by a drug on the basis of that judgment. [22944/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The question refers to a Judgement given by the European Court of Justice and I cannot speculate on its possible relevance to litigation in Ireland.

I cannot comment on individual cases or matters that are the subject of litigation but I can provide background information on this litigation and clarify matters that are already in the public domain.

As of 9 May 2018, legal proceedings against the Minister, the Health Services Executive and GlaxoSmithKline Biological SA have been initiated by seventy individuals. The plaintiffs

24 May 2018

allege personal injury in which they claim the development of narcolepsy resulted from the administration of the H1N1 pandemic vaccine. The management of the cases transferred to the State Claims Agency (SCA) on 15 October 2013 when the Taoiseach signed the National Treasury Management Agency (Delegation of Claims Management Functions) (Amendment) Order 2013. This reflects the greater experience and expertise that the State Claims Agency has in the area of medical litigation.

I have been informed by the Agency that the cases are before the courts in relation to the management of discovery in the lead case. It would not be appropriate to interfere in the courts case management of these claims.

I am continuing to engage with the Minister for Justice and the Minister for Finance on what further improvements can be made to the legal framework governing the management of medical negligence cases.

Protected Disclosures

134. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 810 of 16 January 2018 and 990 of 17 April 2018, the reason no reply has issued from the HSE; and if the replies will be expedited. [22945/18]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

135. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied). [22946/18]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

136. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health when an appointment will be made for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22950/18]

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.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme

137. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health when the review of the fair deal scheme will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22953/18]

139. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the price gap in the cost of State-run HSE nursing homes and private nursing homes; the reason for the difference in costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22956/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 137 and 139 together.

The Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS), commonly referred to as Fair Deal, is a system of financial support for people who require long-term residential care. Participants contribute to the cost of their care according to their means while the State pays the balance of the cost. The Scheme aims to ensure that long-term nursing home care is accessible and affordable for everyone and that people are cared for in the most appropriate settings.

The Report of the NHSS Review published in 2015 identified a number of issues for more detailed consideration, including a review of pricing mechanism by the NTPF, with a view to:

- Ensuring value for money and economy, with the lowest possible administrative costs for clients and the State and administrative burden for providers;
- Increasing the transparency of the pricing mechanism so that existing and potential investors can make as informed decisions as possible; and
- Ensuring that there is adequate residential capacity for those residents with more complex needs.

A Steering Committee has been established to oversee this review which is chaired by the NTPF and includes representatives from my Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The NTPF have responsibility for the development of this report, although Department officials continue to engage with the NTPF regarding the review. The most recent update from the NTPF is that the report will be finalised by mid 2018.

In relation to variations in the cost of care for public and private nursing homes it is acknowledged that public nursing homes have, in general, a higher cost of care. It is understood that a number of factors contribute to this such as higher dependency levels of clients requiring a higher staff skill mix, environmental implications for staffing levels and the geographical provision of residential placements.

That said, there is a need to undertake a deeper analysis of the factors driving the higher costs of care in public units. This is why the 2015 Review of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme identified the need for a Value for Money and Policy (VFM) review of the cost differentials in public and private/voluntary residential facilities. My Department will be working on this VFM throughout the year.

National Drugs Strategy

138. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the further steps that can be taken to protect families and communities from intimidation by drug dealers. [22954/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): The national drug strategy, Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery, acknowledges that criminal activity associated with illicit drug markets can create an intimidating and frightening environment in local communities. In particular, the use of violence or the threats of violence to enforce drug-related debts can impact on the health and wellbeing of families of drug users.

The national drug-related intimidation reporting programme, developed by An Garda Síochána and the Family Support Network, provides a framework to allow reporting of incidents of intimidation to a nominated Garda inspector. An Garda Síochána is currently delivering seminars and briefings to local management and appointed Inspectors in relation to the programme. More information on the programme is available at www.garda.ie/en/Crime/Drugs/The-Drugs-Related-Intimidation-Reporting-Programme.

It is a priority for me that families and communities are protected from drug-related intimidation and I am committed to strengthening the effectiveness of the programme. To this end, An Garda Síochána and the Family Support Network are undertaking evaluations of the programme. These evaluations can inform the development of measures to raise public awareness of the programme.

Question No. 139 answered with Question No. 137.

Health Services Provision

140. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that children in County Westmeath are waiting up to 12 months to access the community ophthalmic physician, COP; the steps he will take to permit these cases to be dealt with by optometrists which will enable children with more severe problems to be seen sooner and more frequently by the COP; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22960/18]

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

Health Screening Programmes

141. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take to ensure that sixth class visual screening which has been abolished by the HSE in counties Longford and Westmeath is replaced by an alternative; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22961/18]

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

Health Services Provision

142. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take to roll out a national scheme to allow children who do not need medical or surgical management to be examined in the community by an optometrist; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[22962/18]

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

Health Services Provision

143. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take to roll out the award winning Sligo cataract scheme across the country with optometrists and hospital eye departments working together, which would significantly reduce the waiting time of 18 months which many persons with cataracts have to endure between being referred and having the surgery to restore their sight; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22963/18]

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

Emergency Departments Data

144. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of patients aged 75 years of age or over who experienced an emergency department wait time of more than 24 hours in April 2018; and the hospitals in which the wait occurred. [22983/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Home Care Packages Data

145. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of home care packages being provided in each LHO area. [22984/18]

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

Home Care Packages Data

146. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the waiting list for a home care package in each LHO area; and the number waiting zero to three, three to six, six to 12 and more than 12 months, respectively. [22985/18]

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

Medical Card Data

147. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons covered by medical cards as of 1 May 2018. [22986/18]

24 May 2018

148. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons covered by general practitioner visit cards as of 1 May 2018. [22987/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 147 and 148 together.

Based on the HSE's figures for the 1st May 2018, 1,587,447 persons currently hold a medical card (of which 137,313 are cards awarded on a discretionary basis) and 496,583 persons currently hold a GP visit card (of which 174,448 are cards awarded on a discretionary basis).

It should be noted that the Primary Care Reimbursement Service in the HSE provides monthly statistical updates on its website, which can be accessed at:

<https://www.sspcrs.ie/portal/annual-reporting/report/eligibility><https://www.sspcrs.ie/portal/annual-reporting/report/eligibility>.

Ambulance Service Data

149. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of ambulance attendances at each emergency department nationwide in April 2018; the number of such ambulances that waited longer than 20 minutes to hand over patients, get their trolleys back and return to responding to calls; and the number that waited longer than 40, 60, 90, 120 and more than 180 minutes for same in tabular form. [22988/18]

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

Hospitals Data

150. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of operations and procedures that were cancelled or postponed in each public hospital to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22989/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the number of operations and procedures that were cancelled or postponed in each public hospital to date in 2018, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Hospitals Data

151. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of operations and procedures that were cancelled or postponed in each voluntary hospital to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22990/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the number of operations and procedures that were cancelled or postponed in each voluntary hospital to date in 2018, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Home Help Service Data

152. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of home help hours provided in each LHO area in each month from January to April 2018; and the way in which this compares against the target for each month. [22991/18]

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

HSE Staff Data

153. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff at national director level, assistant national director level, general manager level and grade VIII level in the HSE on 1 May 2018 or the latest date available. [22992/18]

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

Hospital Beds Data

154. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of beds and wards in all public and voluntary acute hospitals that were closed on 18 May 2018 or the latest date on which data for validated bed closures at hospital and ward level is available. [22993/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Health Services Data

155. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 347 of 27 March 2018, the reply for which was subsequently provided by the HSE, the methodology used to calculate and determine the occupancy rates at each of the facilities referred to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22994/18]

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

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

156. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if a medical product will be supplied to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23005/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Medicines play a vital role in improving the health of Irish patients. Securing access to existing and new and innovative medicines is a key health service objective. However, the challenge is to do this in a safe and sustainable manner. Treatment must be appropriate and proportionate and clinical decision-making, such as prescribing, should be based on both patient needs and sound medical evidence.

Lidocaine 5% medicated plasters are licensed for localised relief of post-shingles pain in

adults. This is the patch's only licensed use in Ireland. It has been reimbursed in the community drugs schemes since 2010.

Clinical concern arose when, from 2012 on, usage increased significantly, to the point where more plasters were being used in Ireland than in the entire UK National Health Service. In such situations, it is important and appropriate for clinicians to review usage and, in 2016, the HSE Medicines Management Programme (MMP) reviewed the use of the plasters. The review estimated that only 5-10% of prescribing was for the licensed indication.

From September 2017, following the clinical review, the HSE introduced a new reimbursement approval system for the patches, to support appropriate use and patient care. Under these arrangements, the patient's GP or consultant applies to the MMP for reimbursement approval on behalf of the patient. If an application is refused, the clinician may submit an appeal, making a clear clinical case for the patient, to the MMP. Information for patients and practitioners is on the HSE MMP website at www.hse.ie/yourmedicines.

The decision to introduce a new reimbursement approval process is a matter for the HSE and you will appreciate that, as Minister for Health, I cannot intervene in individual cases. However, I fully support the objectives of the HSE Medicines Management Programme.

Services for People with Disabilities

157. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) at a HSE facility is paying a higher rate of rent than other residents; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23006/18]

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

158. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if the national disability team has produced new standard operation procedures to assess needs; if they have been implemented by the HSE; and the consultation process that took place before the new procedures were implemented. [23007/18]

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

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

Medicinal Products Availability

159. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health if he has received a request to meet with an organisation (details supplied) regarding access for MS sufferers to new medications; and if he will meet with the organisation. [23016/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Office has been in contact with MS Ireland regarding their request and have scheduled a meeting for early June.

Health Services Staff

160. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if a matter raised in correspondence regarding a crisis in staffing level in a location (details supplied) will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23024/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The State's general policy is to promote the sourcing of labour and skills needs from within the workforce of the State and other EEA states. Where specific skills prove difficult to source within the State and EEA, an employment permit may be sought from the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation by an employer to hire a non-EEA national.

Ireland operates a managed employment permits system which maximises the benefits of economic migration while minimising the risk of disrupting Ireland's labour market. It operates a list system for in-demand occupations (the highly skilled list) and those for whom a ready source of labour is available (the ineligible list).

Care workers are currently included on the ineligible list of employments. Changes to access to the Irish labour market for specific occupations via the employment permits system are made on the basis of evidence which involves research undertaken by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs and the National Skills Council in tandem with an extensive public consultation process with Government Departments, agencies, industry and social partners invited to provide observations.

Retention issues in the State's labour market should not be addressed through the deployment of the employment permits system. There would need to be a clear demonstration that recruitment difficulties are solely due to shortages and not to other factors such as salary and/or working conditions. Organisations such as Nursing Home Ireland would need to provide the necessary data to substantiate their claims. A detailed business case for removal of care workers from the ineligible list would then need to be put forward by my Department to DBEI.

While I have had various meetings with Nursing Homes Ireland and this matter has been discussed, to date such detailed evidence has not been provided by the sector to my Department. It should be noted that the overall policy is that recruitment of workers from non-EEA countries should be a last resort and all other avenues should be first exhausted. However, I am very willing to work with the industry on this important issue to ensure continuity of service in the best interests of residents.

Disabilities Assessments

161. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to concerns expressed regarding a new assessment of needs process being used by the HSE by groups; the steps being taken to address the concerns; his views on whether the new process will not properly assess children for disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23025/18]

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

162. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23035/18]

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

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

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

Disability Services Provision

163. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of children's disability network teams he plans to provide in each local health office area; and the number of such teams in place in each local health office area in tabular form. [23037/18]

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 Assessments

164. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health his views regarding the HSE's implementation of the standard operating procedure for the assessment of need (details supplied). [23038/18]

165. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health his views on concerns being expressed regarding the HSE's implementation of the standard operating procedure for the assessment of need, specifically the limited time allocated for the assessment of need, and that this may result in ineffective intervention pathways being imposed on a child. [23039/18]

166. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health if with regard to the HSE's implementation of the standard operating procedure for the assessment of need he is of the view that to make a decision on whether a child may require further diagnostic assessment, for example, for ASD, based on one clinic visit without seeing the child in other settings and environments is not in line with good practice and could also lead to incorrect indicative diagnosis, delays in appropriate intervention and increased distress and frustration for children and their families. [23040/18]

167. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health if, with regard to the HSE's implementation of the standard operating procedure for the assessment of need, he is of the view that 90 minutes is not a sufficient period of time to adequately assess the needs of children with disabilities. [23041/18]

168. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health if, with regard to the HSE's implementation of the standard operating procedure for the assessment of need, he is of the view that the requirement in the standard operating procedure for occupational therapists to provide all families with strategies to support their child based on a 90 minute preliminary team assessment is not in keeping with standards of good practice in occupational therapy. [23042/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 164 to 168, inclusive, together.

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.

169. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the number of children and adolescents waiting for an appointment for child and adolescent mental health services in CHO1 at the end of April 2018, by periods (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23086/18]

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.

Disabilities Assessments

170. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health his views on concerns expressed by an organisation (details supplied) that the preliminary team assessment model to be used under the HSE's new standard operating procedure for the assessments of need is contrary to the spirit of the Disability Act 2005 which was developed as rights-based legislation. [23093/18]

171. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health his views on concerns expressed by an organisation (details supplied) regarding the HSE's new standard operating procedure for the assessments of need. [23094/18]

172. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health his views on concerns expressed by an organisation (details supplied) regarding the HSE's new standard operating procedure for the assessments of need that it conflicts with HIQA standards. [23095/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 170 to 172, inclusive, together.

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 questions relate to service matters, I have arranged for the questions to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Review

173. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health the status of the review of the fair deal scheme as it is currently applied to farms; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23097/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): A review of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS) was published in July 2015. Arising out of the review, a recommendation was made to examine the treatment of business and farm assets for the purposes of the financial assessment element of the scheme. The Programme for a Partnership Government also committed to reviewing the NHSS to remove any discrimination against small businesses and family farms.

At present, the capital value of an individual's principal private residence is only included in the financial assessment for the first three years of their time in care. This is known as the three

year cap. This cap does not apply to productive assets such as farms and businesses except in cases of sudden illness or disability where specific conditions are met.

It is proposed to amend the scheme to treat farm and business assets in the same manner as the principal private residence where a family successor commits to working the farm or business, i.e. to cap contributions at three years.

The Department of Health has been examining the potential for changes to the treatment of business and farm assets under the Nursing Homes Support Scheme. Any changes to the scheme, if approved by Government, will require amendment of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme Act 2009.

A Memorandum for Government setting out the details of the proposed policy change and seeking Government approval to draft the General Scheme of a bill to amend the Nursing Homes Support Scheme Act 2009 has been prepared and will shortly be circulated to other Government Departments for observations.

State Bodies Data

174. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the financial details and contributions of all service level agreements between the Marine Institute and SEAI since 2012 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22981/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information requested is an operational matter for the State Body themselves. I have referred the Deputy's question to the Marine Institute and have requested that a response should issue within 10 days.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

175. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a payment for a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22910/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): A review by the Director of Agriculture Appeals Office of the decision of the Appeals Officer has been requested in this case in accordance with the provisions of the Agriculture Appeals Act, 2001. The Agriculture Appeals Office has indicated that requests for reviews are generally dealt with in order of receipt and that both the Department and the person named will be advised of the outcome when the review has been completed.

Trade Data

176. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the quantities of pig, poultry and cattle manure imported and exported between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in each of the past five years in tabular form. [22928/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The quantities of poultry, pig and cattle manure traded between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland as recorded on the TRACES system is set out in the following tables for the years 2016 and

2017. The information for the previous three years is archived and is not immediately available and must be sought from the TRACES office in Brussels. The trade details for 2013, 2014 and 2015 will be forwarded directly to the Deputy as soon as the requested information is provided to the Department.

Movement of unprocessed manure from Republic of Ireland to Northern Ireland

	Aves (Poultry)	Suidae (Pigs)	Bovidae (Cattle)
2016	2475	2250	50
2017	75	1850	25

Movement of unprocessed manure from Northern Ireland to Republic of Ireland

	Aves	Suidae	Bovidae
2016	6571	0	0
2017	6870	258	0

Animal Disease Controls

177. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 1144 of 17 April 2018, the reason the person has not been contacted since the cattle were removed in April 2018; if his Department will discuss the options for disposing of the herd in view of the fact that it has been locked into TB testing since September 2016 without a break; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22965/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Following the removal of reactors under DAFM supervision on 27th April, full de-population of the herd in question was approved by senior veterinary management on May 22nd. The appropriate paperwork (i.e. form ER29F) was delivered to the herdowner's holding on 23rd May, and once the herdowner has completed and returned this form arrangements will be put in place for valuation and removal of the animals.

Transfer of Entitlements Application

178. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the number of entitlements will be restored to a person (details supplied); if correspondence from the person will be responded to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22967/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An application to transfer entitlements by way of lease was received from the person named, however there was an error made in the processing of this application. My Department are currently working towards full rectification of this issue and will contact the person named directly to advise them of this.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

179. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if farm payments due to a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22970/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was a joint herd owner on the herd number quoted in 2008. Following this period the

person named became the sole owner of the herd number. My Department have been in contact with the person named in relation to the change in ownership with a view to processing payments due under this herdnumber for 2008 and 2009.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

180. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a farm income supplement payment for a person (details supplied) for February 2018 will be reinstated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22995/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Additional information in regards to this matter is currently being obtained. Once this information has been obtained, a detailed response will issue directly to the Deputy.

Brexit Staff

181. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of full-time and part-time staff assigned to the dedicated Brexit unit in his Department by staff grade in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23026/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Following the UK referendum in June 2016, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine established a dedicated Brexit Co-ordination Unit within its EU & International Trade Division. This Unit now forms part of a new Brexit & International Trade Division. It comprises eight staff working full-time on the co-ordination of Brexit matters, reporting to a Head of Division who also has responsibility for wider international trade issues. The Head of Division, in turn, reports to an Assistant Secretary General who is deeply engaged in Brexit issues in addition to discharging other responsibilities.

The Brexit Unit co-ordinates the ongoing analysis, consultation and engagement activities being undertaken by a large number of administrative, technical and veterinary staff across the Department. It does so through an internal Brexit Response Committee comprised of the relevant experts drawn from the wide range of Divisions affected by Brexit (including, for example, Meat and Milk Policy, Animal Health and Welfare, Food Industry Development, Economics and Planning, and Seafood Policy and Development). It also feeds into the whole-of-Government co-ordination being undertaken by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

In overall terms, my Department is continuing to monitor the future workforce needs of the organisation, and will be keeping resource allocations under close review as the negotiations proceed.

Staff assigned to the Brexit Unit:

Staff	No.
Assistant Secretary General	1 (part)
Principal Officer	1 (part)
Assistant Principal	3
Higher Executive Officer	2
Administrative Officer	1
Executive Officer	1

Staff	No.
Clerical Officer	1

Departmental Staff Data

182. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of full-time and part-time staff working in the dedicated market access unit established in the meat and milk policy division by staff grade in tabular form; and the annual cost of the unit, including staffing costs. [23027/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): One of my key priorities is to further increase the market opportunity for Irish food and drinks internationally. This principle of market development is already a key component of Food Wise 2025, but is particularly important now in the context of Brexit.

The work of staff across the Department impacts on market access and development. This includes veterinary services, laboratory staff, inspectorate staff, Brexit/International Trade Division, Meat and Dairy Policy Division and others, in completing market access questionnaires, facilitating incoming inspection visits, participating in diplomatic meetings, agreeing export health certificates and so on. All of this closely inter-connected work facilitates the accessing of new markets and the maintenance of existing markets.

In relation to meat, this effort is co-ordinated by a dedicated meat market access unit in the Meat and Dairy Policy Division. This unit's staffing complement has increased in line with my action plan on market access. It comprises a team of seven people led by an Assistant Principal Officer. The annual cost for staffing this unit, including salary, PRSI, pension and accommodation, is estimated at approximately €500,000.

The meat market access unit works on expanding market access for beef, sheepmeat, pigmeat, poultry and cooked meats across a range of markets, and is also working to simplify certification procedures in a number of markets to which Ireland already has access. The work of the unit supports a meat industry with exports of around €3.8 billion in 2017.

My Department has made significant progress in recent years in increasing market access opportunities for Irish meat exports.

Young Farmers Scheme

183. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the proposal in the draft report by the European Parliament's agriculture committee (details supplied); and if his Department has carried out costings for increasing funding beyond 2% in this regard. [23028/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The draft report of the European Parliament Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development in relation to the implementation of CAP young farmers' tools in the EU after the 2013 reform was published on 7 December 2017. Measures to support young farmers are a central part of the draft proposals for reform of the CAP post-2020. In this regard my Department officials and I will continue to engage with the EU Commission and other Member States in relation to the future CAP framework, including measures to best support young farmers.

I expect the CAP proposals to be published in the very near future and my department will

examine them carefully at that time.

Brexit Supports

184. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of applications received to date to the recently launched Brexit loan scheme for food businesses specifically by company size (details supplied); the number of applications approved and not approved, respectively, to date by firm size; and the number of loans granted to date in tabular form. [23031/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): One of my priorities is to improve access to finance for the agri-food sector. Food Wise 2025 identifies competitiveness as a key theme and includes a recommendation that stakeholders work to “improve access to finance for agriculture, forestry and seafood producers and agri-food companies”.

Recently I launched the new “Brexit Loan Scheme” in cooperation with the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation and the Minister for Finance, which will provide up to €300 million of affordable, flexible working capital finance to Irish businesses that are either currently impacted by Brexit or who will be in the future. The Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) are administering the Scheme and use the €23million in public funding, along with the EIB Group’s InnovFin SME Guarantee Facility, to leverage the loan fund. Given its significant exposure to the UK market, my Department has contributed €9million, ensuring at least 40% of the fund will be available to food businesses. This is the only sector that has ring-fenced funding.

The Scheme was opened on the 31st March 2018 and will remain open until 31st March 2020, or until it is fully subscribed. The SBCI receives and analyses loan data from the participating banks on a quarterly basis. SBCI have informed my Department that the first official data relating to the Scheme will be available on completion of its first quarter, i.e. to 30th June 2018.

Waste Data

185. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of LDPE or HDPE beverage containers sold here on an annual basis; and the number that are recycled. [22915/18]

186. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of PET beverage containers sold here on an annual basis; and the number that are recycled. [22916/18]

187. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of aluminium beverage containers sold here on an annual basis; and the number that are recycled. [22917/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 185 to 187, inclusive, together.

Packaging statistics are compiled in Ireland by the EPA in accordance with the EU Packaging Directive. In accordance with that Directive, we are obliged to report by tonnage on the following packaging types: Glass, Plastic, Paper and Board, Metals and Wood. In the most recent statistics compiled by the EPA, 282,148 tonnes of plastic were generated in Ireland, of which

34% was recycled. 65,861 tonnes of metal (aluminium and steel) were generated and 75% of this was recycled (<https://www.epa.ie/nationalwastestatistics/packaging/>).

The table below details the amount of tonnage in each of the categories above placed on the market by members of the national producer responsibility scheme (Repak) and the rate at which they were recycled.

Tonnes

	PET	HDPE	Total	Aluminium Cans
Repak Members Tonnes Placed on the Market 2017	23,852	13,416	37,268	9,194
Repak Funded Tonnes 2017 Re-cycled	15,510	8,903	24,413	7,706
Recycling Rate	65%	66%	66%	77%

Waste Disposal Charges

188. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the way in which a company's (details supplied) charges compare to similar schemes in other EU countries. [22918/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The fee structure of the company in question is based on the principle of producer responsibility and is designed to ensure that the cost of recovery of packaging waste is spread on an equitable basis. The key elements of that principle are that responsibility is shared across the supply chain and that producers contribute to national recycling in accordance with the amount and type of packaging they place on the market.

Scheme members who place smaller amounts of packaging on the market pay a once-yearly membership fee, based on a schedule of turnover/tonnage bands determined by Scheme, in consultation with industry and trade associations. Larger producers pay fees based on tonnage and different packaging materials are charged at individual rates, reflecting the level of subsidy required to ensure that those materials are recovered.

Businesses are consistently looking to reduce their product costs and the schemes fee structure is designed to discourage companies from producing excess packaging.

Fees paid by producers in other EU countries vary greatly from one country to another, depending on the Extended Producer Responsibility model in place. Different countries have different markets, funding models, collection and treatment infrastructure. Therefore, it is not entirely appropriate to compare fees. The EU Commission in its publication "Development of Guidance on Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)"[1] outlined the average range of producer fees across the EU. Producer fees ranged from approximately €17 per tonne in the UK to almost €200 per tonne in Austria. In Ireland, the average fee per tonne charged to producers was approximately €45 per tonne.

[1] http://ec.europa.eu/environment/waste/pdf/target_review/Guidance%20on%20EPR%20-%20Final%20Report.pdf

Litter Pollution

189. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the fees a company (details supplied) collects fund litter clean up and litter bin collection in view of the fact that at least 80% of the waste by volume is comprised of packaging. [22919/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The fee structure of the company in question is based on the principle of producer responsibility and is designed to ensure that the cost of recovery of packaging waste is spread on an equitable basis. The fees collected are designed to contribute to national recycling rates in accordance with the amount and type of packaging they place on the market. The fees do not fund litter clean up and litter bin collection.

In 2016, the National Litter Pollution Monitoring System report identified packaging litter as constituting 13.28% of all litter nationally.

Local authorities are responsible for keeping public places that are under their control, including public roads, clear of litter as far as is practicably possible. This includes arranging cleansing programmes, as well as providing and emptying litter bins.

The Litter Pollution Act 1997 provides the statutory framework to combat litter pollution. Under the Act, the primary management and enforcement responsibility rests with Local Authorities, who have a wide range of powers to tackle litter effectively, including “on-the-spot” fines of up to €150 or, on summary conviction, fines up to €4,000, for those who litter.

While rigorous Local Authority enforcement is a part of the solution to littering, I believe that the key to success in tackling litter issues is through awareness raising and education. Education for young people, in particular, through the litter module of the Green Schools Programme which my Department supports each year, is very important. Since 1997, my Department has allocated in excess €15.4 million to Local Authorities under the Anti-Litter and Anti-Graffiti Awareness Grant Scheme (ALAGS). Under this Scheme, Local Authorities are responsible for selecting suitable anti-litter awareness projects for funding and deciding on the grant allocations in individual cases. In 2017, I increased funding for this scheme by 28% to €885,000 and I will be maintaining this level of funding for 2018.

I am pleased that consecutive annual National Litter Pollution Monitoring Surveys (see www.litter.ie) have shown that the litter situation is generally improving across the country in recent years.

Waste Disposal

190. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the level of separate collection of compostable litter in place; and the plans in place to collect more compostable litter separately. [22920/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Local authorities are responsible for keeping public places that are under their control, including public roads, clear of litter as far as is practicably possible. This includes

arranging cleansing programmes, as well as providing and emptying litter bins. Each local authority must prepare a litter management plan for its area, setting out its objectives to prevent and control litter, along with measures to encourage public awareness of litter. The plan must also set out measures and arrangements by which the local authority intends to achieve these objectives. In preparing its litter management plan, the authority must consult with local community and voluntary interests.

The European Union (Household Food Waste and Bio-Waste) Regulations 2015 are designed to promote the segregation and recovery of household food waste. The Regulations impose obligations on both householders and waste collectors. Under articles 4 and 5 of the Regulations, household waste collectors are required to provide, or arrange for the provision of, a separate collection service for organic waste from households in communities greater than 500 persons. Householders are obliged to segregate their food waste and make it available for separate collection. Compostable packaging, including coffee cups can also be disposed of through a food waste collection service and recycled into quality compost.

An organic waste collection service is now being provided in every county across all local authority areas. Ireland has an established nationwide collection and organic recycling infrastructure with the capacity to collect, transport and recycle compostable material. It should be noted that only products which are independently certified to I.S. EN 13432 are deemed compostable and suitable for processing in Irish composting plants.

Waste Management

191. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the steps he is taking to reduce the amount of plastic packaging generated (details supplied). [22921/18]

192. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the steps he is taking to improve the recycling rate for plastic packaging in view of the fact that the plastic packaging recycling rate correspondingly has decreased from 47% to 34% in the years from 2011 to 2015. [22922/18]

193. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the steps he is taking to increase the incentive for packaging producers to reduce plastic packaging. [22923/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 191 to 193, inclusive, together.

I recently wrote to the European Commissioner with responsibility for the environment to welcome the EU 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.

In addition, Ireland has supported the adoption of a set of ambitious measures to make EU waste legislation fit for the future, as part of the EU's wider circular economy policy. The new recycling and landfilling targets set a credible and ambitious path for better waste management in Europe. The new EU Circular Economy Legislative Package, which was published this week, (http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-18-3846_en.htm) includes a new recycling rate of 55% for plastic packaging waste by 2035, which will help drive real progress towards the circular economy, and an ability for Producer Responsibility schemes to modulate costs for individual products or groups of similar products, by taking into account their durability, repa-

rability, re-usability and recyclability and the presence of hazardous substances.

The statistic referred to in the question is based on our national packaging waste return, which we are obliged to provide by 30 June every year to the European Commission. While I am not disputing the figure quoted, I am aware that the manner in which these statistics are reported differs from Member State to Member State. The recent EPA research call includes a study to examine how we compile our packing waste statistics compared to other Member States. The waste characterisation study which is used as part of the return is from 2008. The new waste characterisation study taking place at the moment with funding from my Department will show the current picture of what materials are disposed of in bins in Ireland. This report, when completed, will affect future EU reports around packaging waste returns.

In relation to incentivising packaging producers to reduce the amount of plastic, our national producer responsibility scheme (Repak) is tasked with managing packaging in Ireland. It works with its members (including all the major retailers) to identify ways to reduce or optimise packaging. Repak charges fees to its members in accordance with the amount and type of packaging they place on the Irish market. These fees are used to subsidise the collection and recovery of waste packaging through registered recovery operators across Ireland.

Because Repak members pay fees based on the amount of packaging they place on the market, this incentivises them to reduce packaging where possible and in so doing to reduce their fees. To assist members to optimise their packaging, Repak employ packaging technologists who work with their member companies. The technologists look for ways to optimise the packaging used and to minimise any resulting packaging waste. Repak's Prevent and Save initiative has worked with Irish business to reduce packaging and to promote packaging improvements across industry. Further information can be found on www.repak.ie/preventandsave.

Departmental Legal Cases

194. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he is subject to budgetary constraints when engaging in litigation whether as an applicant, defendant or notice party. [22926/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Chief State Solicitor's Office (CSSO) is a constituent part of the Office of the Attorney General and provides litigation, advisory and conveyancing services to Government Departments. These services are funded from the CSSO's budgetary allocation, which is voted annually by Dáil Éireann.

My Department also procures external legal advice in compliance with procurement regulations, from time to time and where the circumstances warrant it. In such cases, the cost is funded through my Department's own budgetary allocation. In addition, any costs arising from a court award or settlement of proceedings are paid through my Department's Vote, and accounted for in the Appropriation Account, as appropriate.

Offshore Exploration Licences

195. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his Department carries out screening for environmental impact assessment for applications to explore for oil or gas in waters which include the use of seismic testing; if so, the procedures by which this screening is carried out; and if not, the reason therefor. [22932/18]

196. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his Department has carried out an environmental impact assessment for applications to explore for oil or gas in Irish waters which include the use of seismic testing. [22933/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 195 and 196 together.

In advance of the 2015 Atlantic Margin Licensing Round, the Irish Offshore Strategic Environmental Assessment 5 process was undertaken by my Department and included consideration of potential environmental impacts which may arise specifically as a result of petroleum exploration activities. Any exploration activity proposed to be carried out under a petroleum authorisation (e.g. seismic survey or drilling of a well) is subject to assessment of compliance with the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Directive, the Habitats Directive and the Birds Directive.

Geophysical surveys (which include seismic surveys) do not fall under Annex I or II of the EIA Directive as amended. However, such surveys fall to be assessed under the European Union (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Petroleum Exploration) Regulations 2013 (S.I. 134/2013). An assessment is carried out based on the information included in the application to determine whether a survey would result in significant effects on the environment by virtue, inter alia, of the nature, size and location of the survey.

Applications for seismic surveys are considered against a range of technical and environmental considerations.

In respect of environmental considerations the procedures are as follows:- The applicant must submit an Environmental Risk Assessment and a Natura Impact Screening (Appropriate Assessment) Statement in support of the application to commence surveying activities. These documents are made available on my Department's website.- The Environmental Risk Assessment is reviewed for my Department by an independent consultancy, with the required expertise in ecological and conservation marine biology, to assess whether or not it meets the scope and quality of requirements set out or implied by the specific European and Irish Environmental Impact Assessment legislation and guidelines.

- The independent consultancy also reviews the Natura Impact Screening Statement to ensure that the requirements of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations, 2011 for an assessment to be carried out on any plan or project likely to have a significant effect on a protected site or species have been met. In addition, the National Parks and Wildlife Service is requested to provide its observations in terms of Natura 2000 sites, where relevant, and Annex IV species (Cetaceans) in accordance with the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC).

- Following receipt of these reviews a determination is made as to whether an Environmental Impact Assessment Report or a stage 2 Appropriate Assessment is required. The determination is published on my Department's website.

Any observations received from prescribed bodies, interested parties or the general public regarding the potential environmental effects of the activity proposed in the application are considered as part of the consent decision making process.

Air Pollution

197. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the quantity of ammonia that was emitted to the atmosphere in each of the past

five years here as a result of the importation and spreading of animal manure from Northern Ireland. [22934/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Ireland's national ammonia inventory does not include emissions from manures or slurries originating in Northern Ireland. Neither my Department nor the Environmental Protection Agency collects statistics on the volumes of manure or slurry crossing the border. However, I understand from my colleague the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, that his Department collects these statistics and that the volumes are very small, being in the order of less than 7,000 tonnes in either direction for each of the last two years. In the context of the roughly 45,000,000 tonnes of manure generated within the country each year, any such figure from Northern Ireland will have minimal impact on total ammonia emissions to air.

Inland Fisheries Stocks

198. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a review by Inland Fisheries Ireland of trout stocks has been considered when drafting the designated salmonid waters by-law 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22955/18]

199. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the comparative studies, particularly international examples, conducted in the preparation of the proposed designated salmonid waters by-law 2018; if his Department viewed other factors in the decrease of trout stocks in the designated waters in addition to nationwide; if so, the factors; his plans to expand the by-laws nationwide; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22957/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): I propose to take Questions Nos. 198 and 199 together.

Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) are carrying out a wide-ranging review of its national policies on brown trout and pike. These policies, which were published in 2014, were developed by two working groups, which included *inter alia* representatives from the main trout and pike angling federations.

One of the most important issues considered in the previous policies relates to the management of pike in wild brown trout fisheries. In late 2016, a Review Group was established to specifically consider this issue. The Group, having met for information gathering meetings, at which a number of expert scientists made presentations, reviewed and assimilated the data and information provided. The Group reconvened in September 2017.

The presentations delivered to the Group, along with minutes of the meetings and the public consultation submissions are publicly available (<https://www.fisheriesireland.ie/Public-Consultation/public-consultation-national-policy-review-management-of-pike-in-designated-wild-brown-trout-fisheries-3.html#review-group-meeting-minutes-and-other-documents>). Public consultation, a broad representative forum and transparency in the Review Group's deliberations have been a central part of the Group's progression. IFI, as a public authority, recognises the diverse opinions of stakeholders and is obliged to consider all viewpoints on this issue.

In the meantime, I have given notice of proposals to make a Designated Salmonid Waters Bye-Law and instigated a public consultation where observations on the draft proposals may be expressed at any time during the period of 21 days concluding at 5pm on 25 May, 2018.

The proposed (draft) Bye-Law is intended to afford additional protection to wild brown trout confined to seven distinctive State-owned waters where established stock control measures are already in place as a matter of existing policy. These seven limestone lakes are fairly unique in terms of topography and trout habitat and have long been managed as wild brown trout fisheries via established stock management programmes.

The proposed Bye-Law would give statutory status to the policy designation of this small number of distinctive waters and would mean that the waters concerned would continue to be managed primarily as brown trout waters. These waters represent a very small percentage of available angling waters.

It is understood that any broader designation of waters and any required management measures will require primary legislation.

Before it can be finalised, the contents of the proposed Bye-Law and its potential scope will also require legal consultation and settlement. In view of the public consultation, it is not appropriate to comment further at this stage.

Renewable Energy Generation

200. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the responsibility of SEAI for the development and operation of the Galway Bay marine and renewable energy test site at An Spidéal, Contae na Gaillimhe; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22982/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The 2014 Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan (OREDPA) sets out the Government's policy for the sustainable development of our abundant offshore renewable energy resources. Under the OREDPA, Exchequer support for research, development and demonstration of ocean renewable energy (ORE) technology has been increased. Between 2014 and 2017 capital funding of €17.7 million was allocated by my Department for research and development of ORE technology, with a further €4.5 million allocated in 2018.

This funding supports Ireland's commitment to world class test facilities including the Lir National Ocean Test Facility in Cork, the quarter scale Galway Bay test site and the full-scale Atlantic Marine Energy Test Site (AMETS), off the coast of Mayo. It also supports the Prototype Development Fund, operated by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, and provides grant aid to support developers in bringing their ocean energy devices from prototype to full-scale commercial viability.

The development and operation of the Galway Bay marine and renewable energy test site at An Spidéal, Contae na Gaillimhe is the responsibility of the Marine Institute.

The Service Level Agreement (SLA) in place with the Marine Institute is a vital component in the overall management of the SEAI's Ocean Energy Programme. It provides SEAI with direct access to infrastructure, resources and expertise required for operating successfully in the marine environment. The SLA has helped SEAI to leverage significant supports and resources within the Marine Institute and has underpinned the development of an important partnership between the two public agencies in support of the offshore renewable energy sector.

Annually the SEAI agree a work programme with the Marine Institute which typically focuses support for the Galway Bay Test Site Activities as well as support for other complimentary projects (ie development of the web portal, technology deployment on the west coast, data

collection at AMETS, Seabed surveys etc). The work programme sets out SEAI's requirement for support to work on various aspects of the project primarily relevant to test site operation; promotion; technical support; IT development; data management; offshore marine activities and deployments.

A robust reporting and governance structure allows SEAI to closely monitor the progress of the SLA, including an annual report of activities at the test site and quarterly reports on the Galway Bay Test site from Smartbay Ireland, the test site operators.

Driver Licences

201. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the legislation changed regarding driver licence changes which means that a driver licence will expire on the anniversary of its start date regardless of whether there was a period of validity remaining; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22903/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Driving licences in Ireland were previously issued for a fixed period plus the unexpired period on their previously licence. This was changed as of 31 May 2015, by the European Union (Licensing of Drivers) (Validity of Licences) Regulations 2015.

The reason for the change was the requirement of certain fixed periods of validity to apply to categories of driving licences under EU law. Irish practice up to that time, by issuing licences for fixed periods plus the unexpired period on the old licence, was not consistent with EU law, and therefore had to be changed.

Bus Services

202. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a bus stop will be placed at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23008/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and for the overall funding of public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the development of bus stops, bus shelters, bus stations etc. in the State.

In light of the NTA's responsibility in this area, I have referred the Deputy's question to the Authority for a more detailed reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Library Services Funding

203. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if funding will be provided for a new library for Sligo town; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22892/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The provision of premises and facilities in the public library service is generally a matter for each local authority in its capacity as a library authority under the Local Government Act 2001. Accord-

ingly, the development of a new library in Sligo town is primarily a matter for Sligo County Council.

My Department does fund a Libraries Capital Investment Programme, announced in 2016, that will invest some €23m in 17 or so projects, as well as the My Open Library service, over the period 2016 to 2021. The programme was developed on the basis of priority proposals submitted by local authorities. Unfortunately, the value of proposals received from local authorities was substantially greater than the funding available to the programme. It was necessary, therefore, to rank proposals and prioritise funding on the basis of an objective assessment of each proposal.

While Sligo Town Library was identified as priority investment for Sligo County Council, it was not ranked high enough to be included in the programme. Sligo County Council has been advised that the development of Sligo Central Library and all other proposals on hand for funding will be reconsidered should additional capital monies become available.

Action Plan for Rural Development

204. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of persons who applied to schemes (details supplied); and the number of approved applicants in each of the years 2016 to 2018, in tabular form. [23029/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): My Department delivers a suite of programmes referred to by the Deputy which provide direct financial support for the sustainable development of rural areas. These programmes were highlighted in the Action Plan for Rural Development which focuses on supporting sustainable communities, enterprise and employment, maximising rural tourism and recreation potential, fostering culture and creativity in rural communities, and improving rural infrastructure.

Applications for funding under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme, the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme, the CLÁR programme and the Local Improvement Scheme (LIS) are not accepted from individuals, but rather through the Local Authorities and various stakeholder organisations.

Details of the projects approved for each of these schemes since 2016 are available on my Department's website - www.drcd.gov.ie. Further approvals made during 2018 will also be published on the website.

The LEADER programme is administered by Local Action Groups (LAGs) which deliver funding in accordance with Local Development Strategies that have been agreed for each LEADER area. €220 million of the €250 million approved for LEADER under the Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020 has already been allocated to each LAG area. Each LAG is responsible for deciding how their allocation is distributed to LEADER projects over the duration of the programme, based on the objectives in their Local Development Strategies. As of 21 May 2018, 973 projects with a value of €28 million had been approved for LEADER funding by the LAGs while a further 342 projects with a value of €19 million are at various stages in the approval process. Details of individual projects approved are available on my Department's website on a county by county basis.

The Walks Scheme is currently operating on 39 trails supported by 1,905 landowners. The Scheme is managed and administered by 16 Local Development Companies around the country on behalf of my Department.

Rural Development Programme Data

205. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the financial allocations on an annual basis under the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 per measure 19, support for Leader local development; the annual amount expended on the programme in each year of the RDP and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23032/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): LEADER, which is referred to at EU level as Measure 19, forms part of Ireland's Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 and has a total budget of €250 million over the period in question. €220 million of this funding has been allocated to the Local Action Groups (LAGs) throughout the country who deliver the LEADER programme. The remaining €30 million is available for schemes which will be delivered at a national level.

The €220 million funding which has been allocated to the LAGs is provided for the duration of the Programme, rather than on an annual basis. This provides greater flexibility to the LAGs in managing their resources.

Table 1 details the funding allocations provided to LAGs by county under the 2014-2020 LEADER programme. The LEADER areas are, in the main, aligned with the county boundaries. However, County Cork includes three LEADER sub-regional areas.

Table 2 details the overall expenditure incurred each year to date under the 2014-2020 LEADER Programme.

Expenditure under the programme commenced in 2015 and, for that year, relates to preparatory support payments for the preparation of Local Development Strategies. Funding Agreements for the current LEADER programme were, for the most part, signed with the LAGs in the second half of 2016 and the programme effectively became operational from that date from the point of view of project commencement.

Expenditure under the Programme to date includes the cost incurred by the LAGs to develop their Local Development Strategies, the administration costs of the LAGs and the cost of their engagement with communities to generate projects, and expenditure on individual projects.

Project approvals under LEADER have increased significantly and I understand that a total of 973 projects have been approved by the LAGs, with a combined value of approximately €28 million. A further 342 projects with a combined value of €19 million are currently within the approvals process. The level of expenditure under the programme is therefore expected to increase significantly as payment claims are submitted to my Department through the LAGs in respect of these projects.

Table 1: LEADER 2014-2020 Allocations per County

County	Programme Allocation (€)
Carlow	6,416,803.43
Cavan	8,522,285.84
Clare	8,920,224.65
Cork	13,938,823.22
Donegal	12,913,877.86
Dublin	6,370,438.43
Galway	12,195,883.61

County	Programme Allocation (€)
Kerry	10,219,868.29
Kildare	5,261,600.01
Kilkenny	7,791,572.91
Laois	7,124,586.86
Leitrim	5,998,474.74
Limerick	9,276,593.96
Longford	7,597,623.07
Louth	6,101,862.01
Mayo	11,121,431.88
Meath	6,903,123.57
Monaghan	7,592,719.51
Offaly	8,036,763.90
Roscommon	8,852,659.22
Sligo	7,655,647.81
Tipperary	10,103,443.28
Waterford	7,522,796.18
Westmeath	7,384,206.22
Wexford	9,840,140.56
Wicklow	6,336,549.00
TOTAL	€220,000,000

Table 2: LEADER 2014-2020 Expenditure broken down per year

Year	Total
2015	€1,251,185.25
2016	€1,260,920.54
2017	€12,123,851.06
2018 (to date)	€4,834,479.23

Registration of Marriages

206. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the regulations appertaining to permission to marry their fiancé in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23068/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Legislation governing marriage in Ireland is provided for in Part 6 of the Civil Registration Act 2004, as amended.

Persons wishing to be married in the State are obliged to give a minimum of three months' notice of the intention to marry to a registrar [Section 46(1)(a)]. This notification must be accompanied by the prescribed fee which is currently set at €200.00 [Section 46(3)].

Section 46(3A) of the Act provides that in the case where one, or both, of the parties to the marriage are foreign nationals, the notification must be accompanied by documents regarding the immigration status of the foreign national(s).

The parties to the marriage must attend at the office of the registrar and make a declaration that there is no impediment to the marriage.

Further details can be found on the website of the Civil Registration Service <https://www.hse.ie/eng/births-deaths-and-marriages/how-to-get-married-in-ireland/>.

Details of Civil Registration Offices can be found on the same website at: <https://www.hse.ie/eng/births-deaths-and-marriages/civil-registration-services/hse-civil-registration-service-births-deaths-and-marriages.html>.

Community Employment Schemes Administration

207. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if Tús or community employment personnel will be made available to a group (details supplied) in view of the fact that changes have been enacted which will see an increase in the number of participants in such schemes. [22941/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Community Employment (CE) programme and Tús are community centred labour market initiatives established for the purposes of social inclusion and activation, to help long-term unemployed people and other vulnerable groups to enter the workforce by breaking their experience of unemployment through a short term return-to-work routine. The programmes also assist people to enhance and develop both their technical and personal skills, which can then be used in the workplace.

The Tús initiative is delivered through the network of local development companies and Údarás na Gaeltachta in Gaeltacht areas which operate as the Implementing Bodies (IBs) for the programme. The CE programme is sponsored by voluntary organisations and public bodies involved in not-for-profit activities for the benefit of the local community. Requests for the placement of Tús participants are made to the relevant local IB and for CE participants, applications are made to CE sponsoring organisations.

Eligible work placements under both Tús and CE are those which:

- Respond to an identified community need;
- Provide development for participants in areas involving heritage, arts, culture, tourism, sport and the environment;
- Have the agreement of relevant trade unions;
- Do not displace or replace existing jobs;
- Offer valuable work experience for participants.

Placements which are not eligible are those which:

- Are politically or commercially orientated;
- Involve a significant trading element;
- Enhance private property;
- Result in private gain.

Placement of Tús and/or CE participants to work in these clubs is not permitted as:-

- Private member sports clubs are not part of the not-for profit community and voluntary sector.
- Work placements in these clubs would not meet the eligibility criteria as outlined above.

The Department keeps all aspects of its activation programmes under review to ensure the best outcomes for participants and communities.

Disability Allowance Payments

208. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a payment of disability allowance is due to a person (details supplied). [22966/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): A revised decision in this gentleman's case has resulted in an overpayment being assessed against him in respect of DA payments he received while absent from the State from 13 March 2016 to 01 November 2016.

An appeal against this decision is currently with the Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO) and an oral appeal hearing is being scheduled. The person concerned will be informed when arrangements for the oral hearing have been made.

My department is obliged to recoup any debt to it in an appropriate and timely manner and this includes the setting off of arrears due against the debt. Arrears of allowance due from 02 November 2016 to 19 September 2017 cannot be processed until the person in question has had their appeal heard and entitlement has been established.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals

209. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the decision taken in the case of a person (details supplied) will be reviewed immediately based on medical evidence provided; and if an oral hearing will be arranged. [22968/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer, having fully considered all of the available evidence, decided to disallow the appeal of the person concerned by way of a summary decision on 27 April 2018. Under Social Welfare legislation, the decision of the Appeals Officer is final and conclusive and may only be reviewed by the Appeals Officer in the light of new evidence or new facts, or where there has been a change of circumstances which has come to notice since the date of the Appeals Officer's original decision.

I am advised that if the person concerned submits additional evidence that the Appeals Officer has agreed to review the case. The person concerned will then be contacted when the review of his/her appeal has been finalised.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

One-Parent Family Payment Payments

210. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a one parent family allowance and other payments can be restored in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23064/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned is currently in receipt of a one parent family payment. The person concerned incurred an overpayment of €43,529 as their entitlement to a one parent family payment was disallowed from 17/3/2011 to 30/10/2014. The person concerned also had means of €47.50 per week assessed from 01/07/15 to 31/12/2015. The decision to raise this overpayment was appealed to the Social Welfare Appeals Office and this decision was upheld.

A deduction of €28.20 per week against the one parent family payment of the person concerned is currently in place to recoup this overpayment. On 3/1/18, the person concerned contacted the Social Welfare Appeals Office to appeal the decision regarding the repayment of debt. The appeals officer concluded ‘that the initial decision should stand and as a consequence, the overpayment, as assessed, also stands.’

The person concerned is also in receipt of child benefit payments.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

211. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an application for disability allowance refused and refused on appeal can be re-examined in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23065/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The person concerned submitted an application for disability allowance (DA) on 18 April 2017. Their application, based upon all the evidence submitted was refused on habitual residency as she was not found to be habitually resident in the state. The person concerned appealed to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO) the decision by a deciding officer to disallow her application for DA.

Following due consideration, the appeal of the person in question was disallowed by an appeals officer (AO) on 11 May 2018 and she was notified of this decision in writing on the same date.

An AO’s decision is final and conclusive in absence of any fresh facts or evidence. It is open to the person in question to reapply for DA.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

212. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social

Protection the reason disability benefit and allowance was disallowed in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23067/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Illness Benefit is a payment for people who cannot work due to illness and who satisfy the Pay Related Social Insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions. While the maximum continuous period of payment is 624 days this is subject to the actual number of contributions the person has paid.

In this case the person concerned has received all Illness Benefit payments due to them - they were entitled to 312 days of payment based on their contribution history. The person concerned would have been entitled to receive further credited contributions after the payment had expired but no further medical certs were received by my Department. However the person concerned has since made an application to the Community Welfare Officer for assistance under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme.

Exceptional Needs Payment Eligibility

213. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an exceptional needs payment can issue in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23070/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): According to departmental records no application for an exceptional needs payment has been received from the person concerned. An officer of the Department will contact the person concerned today to discuss their circumstances.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Payments

214. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the serious hardship caused in the case of a person (details supplied); if the case can be urgently examined with a view to early intervention; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23071/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned had a reduced Jobseekers payment from 02/05/2018 to 15/05/2018 due to their non-attendance at meetings with their Jobpath Provider. On 15/05/2018 the person re-engaged with the Jobpath Provider and returned to their full Jobseekers payment.

The person concerned has been contacted by my Department and has agreed to submit documentary evidence to explain the reasons for their non-attendance at meetings. On receipt of this information, the person's claim will be reviewed.

If there is any immediate hardship, an application for an Exceptional Need Payment under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme may be made by contacting the Community Welfare Officer for their area direct at 087 2950536.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Approved Housing Bodies

215. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the legislative measures and-or public procurement guidelines in place to ensure that public funds and the ownership of State or council lands used in the provision of social housing built or acquired by approved housing bodies is secured for the State or local authority and-or is recoverable in the event of the insolvency and-or winding up of an approved housing body; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22901/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): As the Deputy is aware, approved housing bodies (AHBs) have a critically important role to play in achieving the targets set out in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan For Housing and Homelessness. Currently, housing bodies are granted approved status by me as Minister, under Section 6 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1992 for the purpose of being able to receive funding from local authorities, to provide social housing. An AHB seeking to obtain, and to retain, approved status in its memorandum or articles of association must:

- Have as primary objectives the relief of housing needs, or poverty or hardship or the welfare of travellers, and the provision and management of housing;

- Have provisions prohibiting the distribution of any surplus, profit, bonus or dividend to members and requiring the assets of the body be applied solely towards its objectives;

- Have a winding-up clause which states that, in the event of winding up or dissolution of the company, there remains any property whatsoever, it shall be given or transferred to some other institution having objectives similar to the objectives of the company.

This arrangement has been in place since 1992 and the Government acknowledges that a more modern regulatory system needs to be put in place to oversee a sector which has developed significantly since then. My Department is currently working on new legislation which will establish a Statutory Regulator to oversee, more effectively, the governance, financial management and performance of voluntary and co-operative housing bodies that provide housing in accordance with the Housing Acts.

In the interim, the Government established an Interim Regulation Committee for the AHB sector under the auspices of the Housing Agency, which, supported by a Regulation Office based within the Agency, oversees implementation of a voluntary regulation code (VRC) for AHBs. Since the Code was put in place, any AHB applying for housing funding from my Department and local authorities must furnish proof of compliance with the Voluntary Code. Only those AHBs that have undergone a satisfactory assessment as part of the annual assessment process by the Regulation Office are considered eligible for funding local authorities for the provision of social housing.

There are a number of schemes under which AHBs can seek to access funding through borrowing from local authorities for the provision of housing. In addition to the oversight regime in relation to the governance and financial stability of the sector, AHBs seeking such funding have to enter into contracts with local authorities under the terms of the various schemes. The contracts provide the terms and conditions under which the AHBs may receive the funding, including provisions in relation to appointing receivers in the event of a default on the loan, so as to ensure the continued use of the relevant property for social housing purposes. If an AHB becomes insolvent and has yet to pay off any capital debts owed to the State, the State retains a substantial interest in the housing assets and the units are not lost from the social housing stock.

Social and Affordable Housing

216. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the measures in place during the scheme assessment process to ensure that the provision of affordable housing by local authorities or approved housing bodies on council or State owned lands does not unfairly compete on unit sale price with private sector investment in the supply of affordable housing under the local infrastructure housing activation fund schemes throughout the country in a manner that may deter or delay further private sector investment in such; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22902/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The development of residential lands owned by local authorities and the Housing Agency, for social housing and, where appropriate, for mixed-tenure developments, is a major priority under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness. To this end, details of some 1,700 hectares of land in local authority and Housing Agency ownership were published on the Rebuilding Ireland Housing Land Map, with the potential to accommodate some 42,500 homes nationally. The map also includes details of some 300 hectares of land in the ownership of other State or semi-State bodies, with the potential to deliver a further 7,500 homes. All of the mapped sites can be viewed at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/rebuilding-ireland-land-map/>.

To date, State-led residential construction has been primarily aimed at helping to meet the needs of households in the lowest income brackets, i.e. those that qualify for social housing. In relation to the delivery of more affordable homes, I am introducing an affordable purchase scheme under the relevant provisions of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, and I am determined to establish a substantial cost rental sector, in order to address the affordability gap in housing on a sustainable and long-term basis.

In order to aid local authorities further in delivering affordable housing from their sites, I am providing funding specifically to unlock and service local authority-owned lands for affordable homes to buy or rent. My Department is currently drawing up the criteria for access to this fund, taking account of broader policies on affordable housing, including in relation to the supply of affordable and discounted housing under the 2016 Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund, and will be seeking submissions from local authorities in the coming weeks.

Tenant Purchase Scheme Review

217. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the report on the future of the tenant purchase scheme will be published; the reason for the delay in publishing same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22911/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In line with the commitment given in Rebuilding Ireland, a review of the first 12 months of the Tenant Purchase Scheme's operation has been undertaken. The review has incorporated analysis of comprehensive data received from local authorities regarding the operation of the scheme during 2016 and a wide-ranging public consultation process which took place in 2017 and saw submissions received from individuals, elected representatives and organisations.

The review is now complete and a full report has been prepared setting out findings and recommendations. In finalising the report some further consultation was necessary and due consideration had to be given to possible implementation arrangements.

These matters are now almost completed and I expect to be in a position to publish the outcome of the review shortly.

Environmental Impact Assessments

218. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the screening procedures undertaken and communicated to the public here to determine whether a transboundary impact on the environment and-or human health is likely from an application in Northern Ireland for an installation for the intensive rearing of pigs and poultry, further to Ireland's and the UK's obligations under the environmental impact assessment directive. [22929/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In the first instance, it is the responsibility for Northern Ireland or UK authorities to ensure that they comply fully with the obligations under relevant EU obligations, including in respect of transboundary consultation requirements under the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (the Espoo Convention) and Directive 2011/92/EU relating to Environmental Impact Assessment.

My Department has requested the Northern Ireland Department for Infrastructure to provide certain information in relation to the proposed development referred to in the Question, with a view to establishing whether the development is considered likely to have significant effects on the environment in Ireland and whether the transboundary consultation provisions in the Espoo Convention and EIA Directive should be applied in this case.

Environmental Impact Assessments

219. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when Ireland plans to ratify the second amendment to the Espoo Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context published in 2004 which came into force on 23 October 2017 and which has been ratified by 32 nations; and if Ireland is committed to this international convention and will ratify the second amendment without further delay. [22930/18]

220. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if Ireland has undertaken the legislative changes necessary to comply fully with transboundary obligations under the environmental impact assessment directive and the Espoo Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context. [22931/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 219 and 220 together.

Section 174 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 and Chapter 5 of Part 10 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended, relating to consultations about the transboundary environmental effects of proposed developments that are subject to environmental impact assessment (EIA), comply fully with the requirements of EIA Directive 2011/92/EU and the text of the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (the Espoo Convention), as ratified by Ireland.

The changes to the transboundary requirements set out in the most recent EIA Directive 2014/52/EU will be brought into force in Ireland as part of the overall transposition of the 2014

Directive, work on which is proceeding as a priority across all relevant Government Departments.

The Second Amendment to the Espoo Convention contains measures that are not included in either the 2011 or 2014 EIA Directives or in domestic planning legislation and will be considered further in the context of ratification by Ireland of the Amendment.

Election Management System

221. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a number of foreign nationals have received polling cards in County Meath for the upcoming referendum on the eighth amendment (details supplied). [22959/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): Under electoral law, local returning officers are responsible at a referendum for sending a polling information card (PIC) to every presidential elector (i.e. Irish citizen) whose name is on the register of electors.

Electoral law also provides that the preparation of the Register of Electors is a matter for each local registration authority. It is their duty to ensure, as far as possible and with the cooperation of the public, the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the Register. Only those individuals who are recorded on the register as entitled to vote at a referendum will be allowed to vote in the forthcoming referendum on 25 May 2018. A polling card does not entitle an individual to vote.

Section 149 of the Electoral Act 1992 (as applied to referendums by section 6 of the Referendum Act 1994) provides that a person who is not registered or who is registered but not entitled to be so registered shall not be entitled to vote. The Act also provides that it is an offence to vote when not entitled to do so.

In relation to prosecuting such an offence, this would be a matter for the Gardaí.

Planning Issues

222. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of meetings held between Dublin City Council and his Department regarding the development of Poolbeg west in the six months prior to the special Dublin City Council meeting on 18 May 2017; the persons who were invited to and who attended each meeting; if the minutes of the meetings will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22996/18]

223. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of meetings held between the receiver of the Poolbeg west SDZ and his Department in the six months prior to the special Dublin City Council meeting on 18 May 2017; the persons who were invited to and who attended each meeting; if the minutes of the meetings will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22998/18]

224. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of telephone calls made respectively between the receiver of the lands in the Poolbeg west SDZ and Dublin City Council and between the receiver and his Department, in the six months prior to the special Dublin City Council meeting on 18 May 2017; and if he

will make a statement on the matter. [22999/18]

225. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of meetings held between Dublin City Council and his Department regarding the development of Poolbeg west SDZ in the six weeks prior to a company (details supplied) appealing the inclusion of over 10% social housing in the SDZ scheme; the persons who were invited to and attended each meeting; if the minutes of the meetings will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23000/18]

226. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of meetings held between the receiver of the Poolbeg west SDZ and his Department in the six weeks prior to a company (details supplied) appealing the inclusion of over 10% social housing in the SDZ scheme; the persons who were invited to and attended each meeting; if the minutes of each meeting will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23002/18]

227. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of telephone calls made between the receiver and Dublin City Council in the six weeks prior to a company (details supplied) appealing the inclusion of over 10% social housing in the Poolbeg west SDZ scheme; the number of telephone calls made between the receiver and his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23003/18]

228. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if a record of the communications between his Department and the receiver for lands in the Poolbeg west SDZ since 18 May 2017 will be provided; if the content of the communications will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23004/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 222 to 228, inclusive, together.

My Department's involvement in the Poolbeg West Strategic Development Zone (SDZ) arises in the context of my statutory role in the designation and future planning of the area as an SDZ, and in that context, setting out the broad views of my Department in relation to planning and housing policies relevant to the preparation and adoption of a planning scheme for the area by Dublin City Council.

In terms of the chronology of events, Poolbeg West was designated an SDZ by order of Government in May 2016. Subsequently, Dublin City Council, as the designated development agency, began the process of drawing up a detailed masterplan or planning scheme for the area designated in the Government Order.

A draft of this planning scheme was published for public consultation from late January 2017 to early March 2017. The draft planning scheme was further considered by the Council in May 2017, after which material alterations were published for 4 weeks from mid-June to mid-July 2017 for public consultation. The final SDZ Planning Scheme was approved by Dublin City Council on 2 October 2017, which decision was ultimately appealed to An Bord Pleanála.

My Department issued observations to Dublin City Council on the draft planning scheme in March 2017, which was followed by extensive engagement during April and May 2017 between my Department, Dublin City Council and NAMA and which also included interactions between my predecessor and the Housing Strategic Policy Committee of Dublin City Council, and local community interests. My Department made a further submission in July 2017 which noted the material alteration in relation to mixed tenure.

All of the above interactions were concerned with determining an appropriate voluntary

mechanism, whereby the private owners of the lands covered by the SDZ would agree to deliver additional social and affordable housing within the SDZ area, in conjunction with Dublin City Council and relevant housing providers, over and above the 10% statutory requirement under Part V, subject to satisfying value for money, procurement and qualitative criteria.

In this context, my Department had no engagement with the receiver in control of these privately owned lands on or about the May 2017 decision by Dublin City Council to amend the draft planning scheme in respect of these matters. Notwithstanding the fact that my Department has consistently advised that provision of additional social and affordable housing could be provided in the SDZ area through a consent-based and commercially grounded approach, the ultimate decision of the Council moved towards a mandatory approach, over and above the provisions of Part V.

In November 2017, an appeal was lodged to An Bord Pleanála by the receiver and other parties. There was no engagement between my Department and the receiver ahead of this appeal.

Earlier this year, officials from my Department were in contact with representatives of both Dublin City Council and the receiver. While these engagements were not formally minuted, their purpose was to encourage engagement between these two parties in relation to determining and putting in place an agreed way forward, if An Bord Pleanála ultimately approved the planning scheme.

Details in relation to engagements between other parties which did not involve my Department, are a matter for those parties.

Rent Pressure Zones

229. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of his commitment to bring student residences in under the rules of the Residential Tenancies Board in respect of rent pressure zones; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23043/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Rent Pressure Zones have their legal basis under the Residential Tenancies Acts 2004-2016, which regulate the landlord-tenant relationship in the private rented residential sector. Pursuant to section 3(1) of the 2004 Act, the Acts apply to every dwelling that is the subject of a tenancy. The provisions of the Acts, including those provisions providing for the rent pressure zone measure, do not apply where the dwelling is occupied by a person under an agreement which is not a tenancy agreement.

Licensing agreements, such as those that apply in respect of some types of student accommodation, are not covered by the legislative protections of the Residential Tenancies Acts because they are not deemed to be tenancy agreements for the purposes of the Acts. Consequently, the restrictions on rental increases in Rent Pressure Zones, provided for in the Acts, do not therefore apply to accommodation types that are not subject to a tenancy agreement.

However, if there is any doubt as to the type of agreement in place in respect of individual dwellings, for example whether it is a tenancy or licence, the matter should be referred to the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) for a determination.

In addition, the Department of Education and Skills (DES) is liaising with my Department, including through the forum of the Inter-Departmental Working Group on Student Accommodation which is convened by the DES, to examine the wide range of student accommodation

types (and ancillary services) available with a view to considering how best to regulate pricing arrangements.

Planning Data

230. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of local area plans, strategic development zones and county development plans in operation by local authority in tabular form; the number in operation in 2005, 2010 and 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23047/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): On the basis of the latest information available to my Department from local authorities across the country, there are 193 statutory city and county development plans, local area plans and strategic development zone planning schemes currently in place under the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).

The following table, compiled on the basis of information provided by planning authorities, sets out the detailed numbers of county/city development plans, local area plans and strategic development zones for each local authority in 2005, 2010 and 2018.

Local Authority	County/ City Development Plan			Local Area Plan			SDZ		
	2005	2010	2018	2005	2010	2018	2005	2010	2018
Carlow County Council	1	1	1	7	17	3	0	0	0
Cavan County Council	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Clare County Council	1	1	1	4	4	1	0	0	0
Cork City Council	1	1	1	1	3	3	0	0	0
Cork County Council	1	1	1	13	13	8	0	1	1
Donegal County Council	1	1	1	7	12	0	0	0	0
Dublin City Council	1	1	1	0	2	9	0	1	2
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council	1	1	1	0	4	6	0	1	1
Fingal County Council	1	1	1	20	18	24	1	1	1
Galway City Council	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
Galway County Council	1	1	1	8	16	10	0	0	0
Kerry County Council	1	1	1	16	7	7	0	0	0
Kildare County Council	1	1	1	17	18	12	0	0	0
Kilkenny County Council[1]	2	2	2	10	26	5	0	0	0
Laois County Council	1	1	1	0	4	4	0	0	0

			County/ City Develop- ment Plan			Local Area Plan			SDZ
Local Authority	2005	2010	2018	2005	2010	2018	2005	2010	2018
Leitrim County Council	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0
Limerick City & County Council[2]	2	2	2	15	18	16	0	0	0
Longford County Council	1	1	1	0	8	0	0	0	0
Louth County Council	1	1	1	3	3	3	0	0	0
Mayo County Council	1	1	1	0	6	4	0	0	0
Meath County Council	1	1	1	1	35	1	1	1	1
Monaghan County Council	1	1	1	10	0	0	0	0	0
Offaly County Council	1	1	1	3	3	2	0	0	0
Roscommon County Council	1	1	1	3	7	6	0	0	0
Sligo County Council	1	1	1	4	6	2	0	0	0
Sth Dublin County Council	1	1	1	2	4	4	1	2	2
Tipperary County Council[3]	2	2	2	0	0	2	0	0	0
Waterford City & County Council[4]	2	2	2	5	3	3	0	0	1
Westmeath County Council	1	1	1	2	10	2	0	0	0
Wexford County Council	1	1	1	11	7	4	0	0	0
Wicklow County Council	1	1	1	8	12	6	0	0	0
Totals	35	35	35	171	267	149	3	7	9

1 Kilkenny County Council and Kilkenny Borough Council were two planning authorities prior to 2014

2 Limerick City Council and Limerick County Council were two planning authorities prior to 2014

3 Tipperary North and South Riding County Councils were in existence prior to 2014

4 Waterford City Council and Waterford County Council were two planning authorities prior to 2014

Electoral Commission Establishment

231. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of his plans for establishing an electoral commission; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23048/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): I refer the Deputy to the reply to Questions Nos. 220 and 224 of 16 May 2018 which sets out the position in this matter.

Planning Investigations

232. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when he plans to publish the report on certain planning matters in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23049/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department received a report from Senior Counsel in June 2017 regarding his Review Into Certain Planning Matters In Respect Of County Donegal.

My Department is currently reviewing and assessing the contents of Senior Counsel's report and I have requested the advice of the Attorney General in respect of a number of points, including the issue of publication and dissemination of the report and any further actions arising.

When I have received the Attorney General's advice, my Department will finalise a submission for my consideration, on foot of which I will be in a position to address the matter further.

Water Services

233. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if an ongoing issue (details supplied) with Irish Water will be resolved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23059/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under sections 43 and 54 of the Water Services Act 2007, responsibility for maintenance and replacement of any water or wastewater pipes, connections or distribution systems that are located within the boundary of a private property rests with the owner. This was the position that pertained prior to the establishment of Irish Water, when individual local authorities held responsibility for public water services and infrastructure.

While the Act of 2007 sets out the legal position, Irish Water has developed the First Fix Free scheme for repairing domestic leaks, in line with broader water conservation policy objectives. The relevant policy document, Irish Water First Fix Leak Repair Scheme for Domestic Water Customers, as approved by the Commission for Regulation of Utilities on 5 August 2015, is available at the following weblink - www.water.ie/for-home/first-fix/first-fix-leak-repair-scheme.pdf.

The arrangements for the repair of leaks is an operational matter for Irish Water in which I have no direct involvement. However, I understand that Irish Water will repair a reported leak regardless of the size of that leak, within the parameters of its role as the public water services authority and subject to the criteria set out under the First Fix Free Scheme. I also understand that arrangements for the necessary repair works in this instance have been agreed by Irish Water with the homeowner concerned.

It may be helpful to note that Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. They may be contacted via email to oireachtasmembers@water.ie or by telephone on 1890 578 578.

Heritage Council

234. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the estimated cost per annum of the town centre health check programme; the number of checks undertaken per annum since its inception; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23052/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): A pilot Town Centre Health Check training programme was developed in late 2016 by the Heritage Council working in collaboration with universities and other bodies. The operation of the programme is primarily a matter for the Heritage Council.

I understand that seven towns have participated to date and funding of €15k has been allocated. An evaluation of the pilot programme is underway and a full report is expected to be published this year.

It is primarily a matter for the Heritage Council to decide how its funding should be allocated across the range of research, education and conservation programmes it supports, having regard to competing priorities for limited resources, however my Department will continue to work closely with the Heritage Council to ensure continued investment is appropriately targeted within the heritage area.

Further information on the programme is available from the Heritage Council and on their website www.heritagecouncil.ie

Irish Language

235. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the amount allocated to the language planning fund on a national and per county basis in each year since funding commenced; the 2018 allocation; and the amount of expenditure expended in tabular form. [23030/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): In order to further assist the implementation of the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030, of which the language planning process is an integral part, a specific fund was established in 2014. This fund has been used since 2014 for the implementation of the language planning process, which began to operate in that year, as well to finance a range of specific projects, measures and initiatives as additional support for both the implementation of the Strategy and the language planning process, accordingly.

As the language planning process is a key part of the implementation of the Strategy, it has been necessary, in the context of the remits assigned to them under the process, to allocate sufficient funding to both Údarás na Gaeltachta and Foras na Gaeilge, as appropriate, to enable them to support the preparation and implementation of language plans for Gaeltacht Language Planning Areas, Gaeltacht Service Towns and Irish Language Networks.

The following table outlines the amount allocated specifically for the language planning process in each county for the years 2014 to 2017 by Údarás na Gaeltachta and Foras na Gaeilge. It is worth noting that further costs were incurred in administering the process such as training, publicity, workshops, material etc. which does not relate to one specific county.

Questions - Written Answers

County	2014 €	2015 €	2016 €	2017 €
Gaeltacht Language Planning Areas				
Donegal	51,000	15,000	50,327	36,673
Mayo	0	0	28,000	30,000
Galway	50,000	55,815	35,500	69,231
Kerry	35,000	0	33,608	11,734
Cork	0	15,000	0	31,200
Waterford	15,000	0	9,763	6,000
Meath	0	0	10,000	12,000
Gaeltacht Service Towns				
An Clochán Liath, Co Donegal	0	0	0	0
Béal an Mhuirthead, Co Mayo	0	0	0	0
Daingean Uí Chúis, Co Kerry	0	0	0	9,749
Letterkenny, Co Donegal	-	-	-	10,000
Galway City	-	-	-	10,000
Irish Language Networks				
Loughrea, Co. Galway,	-	-	-	15,000
Ennis, Co. Clare,	-	-	-	15,000
Clondalkin, Dublin	-	-	-	15,000
Projects and initiatives directly benefiting the implementation of the Strategy	299,879	286,125	659,152	613,000

It is also worth noting that, as of 2018, an allocation worth €2.65m has been made available for the Language Planning Process. As the process is moving forward this year from the preparation of plans to their implementation, the whole fund has been directed towards the process as well as to a number of specific new measures that will be funded centrally as additional support for the language planning process.

The language planning process is now underway in all 26 Gaeltacht areas and the first six language plans have been approved. Five further plans are currently being assessed by the Department with the expectation of approving them in the near future. An allocation of up to €100,000 will be provided over a 12 month period in respect of each area in order to begin implementing the plans. An additional €50,000 will be allocated in respect of 5 specific language planning areas due to particular challenges associated with these areas.

The preparation of plans is in hand in relation to the Gaeltacht Service Towns of Letterkenny, Daingean Uí Chúis, and the cities of Galway and Cork, while it is anticipated that work will begin this year to prepare plans in respect of Dungarvan, Tralee, An Clochán Liath and Castlebar.

Preparation of plans continues in relation to the Irish Language Networks of Ennis, Loughrea and Clondalkin, with plans expected to be submitted for approval by end of year.

Heritage Council Funding

236. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if ad-

24 May 2018

ditional funding will be made available to a scheme (details supplied) to reopen it to new bookings in 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23033/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): The Heritage Council, which is funded by my Department, is independent in the performance of its functions. It is a matter for the Heritage Council to decide how its funding is allocated across the range of research, education and conservation programmes it supports.

In 2018, I allocated funding of €6.377M to the Heritage Council as part of the annual Estimates process. This represents an increase of €123,000 on the 2017 allocation, which, in turn, had been increased by over €1 million on the 2016 allocation.

The Programme mentioned by the Deputy is very popular and successful in raising awareness and appreciation of our national heritage. I am informed by the Heritage Council that the Programme is fully booked for this year. I understand, however, that the Council is examining whether it can identify further funding to allow the Programme to expand and meet increased demand.

I also understand that the Heritage Council plans to develop the Programme further as part of their new Strategic Plan which will be published shortly.

More detailed information on this Programme and the Heritage Council's other activities is available on its website www.heritagecouncil.ie or by contacting the Council directly.

