

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 13, inclusive, answered orally.

Taoiseach's Meetings and Engagements

14. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his attendance at the EU West Balkans summit in Sofia, Bulgaria on 17 May 2018. [22242/18]

19. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his attendance at the EU summit meeting on the Western Balkans in Sophia. [22603/18]

20. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his visit to Bulgaria and the issues that were discussed. [22611/18]

21. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Taoiseach if the suggested USA tariffs were discussed at meetings that he attended in Bulgaria. [22612/18]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 14 and 19 to 21, inclusive, together.

I travelled to Sofia, Bulgaria, where I participated in an Informal EU Summit on the evening of 16 May, and the EU-Western Balkans Summit on 17 May.

The Informal Summit on 16 May was chaired by President Tusk and focused on innovation and the digital economy and possible future EU actions to promote investment in artificial intelligence and breakthrough innovation.

On transatlantic relations, there was strong support for insisting on a permanent exemption from US tariffs on steel and aluminium and a readiness to engage in subsequent talks with the US on improving reciprocal market access, liberalisation of government procurement and reform of the WTO.

The EU Western Balkans Summit on 17 May was attended by EU leaders and the leaders of the six regional partners - Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Bosnia Herzegovina and Kosovo. This was the first such Summit in 15 years. We reaffirmed the European perspective of the Western Balkans and agreed a set of measures for enhanced cooperation with the region.

Questions Nos. 15 to 18, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 19 to 21, inclusive, answered with Question No. 14.

Questions Nos. 22 to 24, inclusive, resubmitted.

Taoiseach's Meetings and Engagements

25. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Taoiseach when he last spoke to the British Prime Minister, Mrs. Theresa May. [22244/18]

29. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his engagement with the British Prime Minister, Mrs Theresa May on 17 May 2018. [22695/18]

30. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his recent meeting with the British Prime Minister in Sofia. [22705/18]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 25, 29 and 30 together.

I met with Prime Minister May on the margins of the EU-Western Balkans summit in Sofia, Bulgaria, on 17 May.

We discussed current developments in relation to Brexit and the ongoing efforts to assist the parties in Northern Ireland to re-establish the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement.

Prime Minister May told me that she expects to table a new proposal on the future customs relationship between the European Union and the UK shortly.

I have yet to see the exact detail of any such proposal. I indicated that any move on customs that keeps the UK close to the EU is to be welcomed.

I indicated that we're willing to examine the UK proposal, but we need to see it presented as a formal written proposal in the Brexit negotiations process.

I also emphasised to the Prime Minister that upholding the commitment to avoid a hard border requires progress on more than just customs.

The agreed report from December makes clear that continued alignment on both single market and customs rules is necessary. In many ways, the regulatory issues are even more important than customs here.

More generally, I made clear to the Prime Minister that Ireland would continue to insist on a legally operable backstop being in the Withdrawal Agreement. This would be in line with the commitments made by the UK in December and repeated by the Prime Minister in her letter to Donald Tusk, President of the European Council, in March.

We now need to see concrete progress on the delivery of these commitments by the time of the June European Council.

I have been consistent in my message to both Prime Minister May and my fellow EU Heads of State and Government at the European Council that reintroduction of a border on the island of Ireland is not acceptable under any circumstances.

Questions Nos. 26 to 28, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 29 and 30 answered with Question No. 25.

Questions Nos. 31 to 42, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 43 to 52, inclusive, answered orally.

53. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans in relation to forestry in the context of the new European climate and energy plan under preparation. [23800/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): When sustainably managed, forests have the additional and significant benefit of being a permanent store or reservoir of carbon over the long term and provide wood products that can substitute more energy intensive materials. The National Inventory Report 2017 to the UNFCCC shows that in 2015 Irish forests and wood products sequestered 4.3 Million Tonnes of CO₂ equivalent.

Under the now agreed Effort Sharing Regulation, forests and other land-uses must be accounted and, in Ireland's case, up to 26.8 MT CO₂ eq of greenhouse gas removals can be accounted against our national non-ETS targets during the 2020 to 2030 period. This figure is based on 15% of average agriculture emissions in 2008-2012 in recognition of the limited mitigation potential in agriculture. Afforestation is measured as the greenhouse gas change in forests less than 20 or 30 years of age. Thus the mitigation benefits of current afforestation in terms of national targets can last for a considerable time.

Wood harvested from forests is itself a long term, renewable carbon pool and can produce sustainable materials that can substitute more emissions-intensive non-renewable materials and fossil fuels. With regard to forest based biomass almost 1.6 million cubic metres of this material was used for energy purposes in 2016. Domestically produced biomass was the primary source of this material and abated 761,000 tonnes of CO₂ emissions from fossil fuels. My Department's strategy is to fully exploit the potential of forestry in relation to climate change mitigation. I have made sure to place at the core of this strategy ongoing support for a sustainable afforestation programme.

My Department's action plan for forestry is set out in the Forestry Programme 2014 -2020 which represents almost €500 million in development funding for the sector. During the period 2015 – 2017 over 18,000 hectares of new forests have been established. A midterm review of the programme was finalised earlier this year and new measures were put in place to drive further planting. Increased planting rates were introduced, with a particular focus on broadleaf species.

Andrew Doyle T.D. Minister of State in my Department with responsibility for forestry, has recently established a Forestry Implementation Group comprising stakeholders from the forestry sector, landowners and environmental NGOs to help drive implementation of the Afforestation Programme to 2020.

Finally, a publicly funded capital programme for afforestation beyond the lifetime of the current Forestry Programme 2014-2020 is provided for under the National Development Plan 2018-2027 thus demonstrating this Government's ongoing commitment to forestry as a key element of our climate change mitigation strategy.

Farm Household Incomes

54. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the way in which figures in relation to farm incomes over the past year compare to previous years; and the efforts he is making to grow farm incomes in the future. [23619/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In March this year the Central Statistics Office released its Preliminary Estimate of Output, Input and Income in Agriculture and this shows that aggregate farm income, or operating surplus, increased by

35% to €3,498 million in 2017. This followed an increase in aggregate farm income of 3.6% in 2016 and 2.3% in 2015.

Last week Teagasc released preliminary results of its National Farm Survey (NFS) for 2017, which showed that average family farm income was the highest on record at almost €31,400, a 32% increase on 2016. Average family farm income fell by 9% in 2016 and increased by 5% in 2015. It should be noted that there are significant differences in family farm income depending on the system of farming and the size of the farm. Average income on:

- Dairy farms increased by 65% to €86,100
- Cattle rearing farms increased by 1% to €12,700
- Cattle finishing farms decreased by 1% to €16,700
- Sheep farms increased by 8% to €16,900
- Tillage farms increased by 20% to €37,200.

Dairy farms are consistently the most profitable farms, when looked at per farm and per hectare. However it should also be noted that almost all dairy farms are classified as full-time farms in terms of the labour input required. Most cattle farms and the majority of sheep farms are classified as part-time in terms of labour input requirements. This preliminary release does not break farm income down between full and part-time farms but this will be available with the full NFS 2017 publication in the summer. The NFS for 2016 showed an average income of almost €46,600 for full-time farms and €11,100 for part-time farms on a labour input basis.

The Food Wise 2025 strategy includes actions to support farmers in improving the competitiveness and profitability of their enterprises. This includes actions aimed at helping farmers to improve productivity, manage the impact of price volatility and adopt new technologies. There are also actions to incentivise land mobility and farm restructuring. These actions and the various supports available from CAP direct payments, the Rural Development Programme and our agri-taxation system are aimed at making Irish farm enterprises more competitive and sustainable, and maximising their contribution to regional and local rural economies.

I expect specific legislative proposals on the shape of the CAP post 2020 to be published in early June. I will be working hard to ensure that these proposals are configured in a way that supports family farm incomes, the rural economy and the environment.

Fisheries Protection

55. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if scientific advice on replenishing and maintaining fish stocks above levels capable of supporting maximum sustainable yield was taken into consideration during the negotiations on allowable catch for commercial fish stocks in December 2017 in the interest of sustaining the future of the fishing industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23732/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The European Commission makes proposals each year for Total Allowable Catch (TAC) levels for each stock - they are based on formal advice received from the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), the independent international body with responsibility for advising on the state of fish stocks. Our own Marine Institute is a very active contributor to the work of that body. The Commission also takes account of the views of the (STECF) Scientific, Technical and Eco-

conomic Committee for Fisheries, on the economic, technical and social impacts of the scientific advice. It is these proposals that are considered by the Fisheries Council each December.

As part of our preparation for the December Council each year, I present a Sustainability Impact Assessment on the proposals to the Oireachtas. This assessment is informed by the advice of the Marine Institute, a socio economic assessment by BIM and the views of stakeholders following a public consultation. This work informs my position on the negotiations.

The advice from ICES is principally based on achieving the Maximum Sustainable Yield exploitation rate or FMSY as it is more commonly known. This is the largest average catch or yield that can continuously be taken from a stock under existing conditions without damaging the future returns from the stock. It is also one of the key objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy agreed in 2013 to bring and maintain our fish stocks to levels that can deliver FMSY by 2020 at the latest.

In 2009, only five stocks had Total Allowable Catches set at FMSY. The outcome of the 2017 December Fisheries Council brought 53 stocks to FMSY levels.

Ireland intends to continue to work with all stakeholders, Member States and the Commission to build upon this substantial and tangible progress to achieve the ambitious targets set out in the CFP.

Questions No. 56 answered orally.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Funding

57. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the way in which the €25 million extra allocated to the ANC in 2018 will be distributed. [23618/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I am very aware of the importance of the Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) Scheme, which issues annual payments in excess of €200 million to over 95,000 farmers.

The ANC Scheme has always been recognised as a very important support for rural society and farmers across the country who farm constrained lands. In light of the importance of the scheme, the Programme for a Partnership Government included a commitment to provide an additional €25m for the Scheme in 2018. I am pleased to confirm that this commitment was delivered in Budget 2018 and that, subject to the EU Commission's approval of an amendment to Ireland's Rural Development Programme, this new funding will be available for payment under the 2018 ANC Scheme.

A number of different options were available in deciding how this additional funding was to be divided. I was conscious of the need for money to be targeted at those farmers on lands with higher levels of constraint.

With this in mind and having considered the views of stakeholders, I decided to distribute the additional €25 million as follows:

- €13m will be allocated to the 'mountain type land' category
- €9m will be allocated to the 'more severely handicapped' category and
- €3m will be allocated to the 'less severely handicapped' category.

These allocations will have the effect of increasing the current payment per hectare rates across all land categories. Those farming on what is called “mountain type land” will see their payment increase from €109.71 to €135 on their first 10 hectares, and from €95.99 to €112 on remaining hectares up to a maximum of 34 hectares. Farmers with land categorised as “more severely handicapped lowland” will see an increase from €95.99 to €104 per hectare up to a maximum of 30 hectares. Finally, those with “less severely handicapped lowland” will see an increase from €82.27 to €88.25 per hectare up to a maximum of 30 hectares.

I am satisfied that these increased payment rates are consistent with the underlying logic of the Scheme, where the highest level of support is targeted at those who are faced with the highest level of constraint on their land. These changes must now be formally agreed with the EU Commission, by way of an amendment to our Rural Development Programme. My officials have initiated this process, with a view to introducing these new rates for payment in 2018.

Sheepmeat Sector

58. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the amount of financial support which has been received by sheep farmers in each of the past three years. [23620/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I am very conscious of the important role that the sheep sector plays in relation to the continued growth and development of our agri-food sector. For example, some 57,000 tonnes of Irish sheep meat worth €274 million was exported last year, with diversification evident from our traditional primary markets of France and the UK.

With this in mind, I have ensured that my Department has put in place a range of supports for the sheep sector in recent years across a number of schemes. On CAP Pillar 1, sheep farmers continue to benefit from the direct income support available under the Basic Payment Scheme. In addition, Ireland’s Rural Development Programme (RDP), 2014-2020, also contains a number of support schemes which offer direct financial benefit to Irish sheep farmers. Sheep farmers continue to benefit from the Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC) Scheme and from GLAS in large numbers, as well as from capital investment support under TAMS. The RDP also includes specific provision for sheep farmers within the Knowledge Transfer Programme, which has helped to build on the existing knowledge base and skills set in the sector in a way which will help to ensure continued sustainable development in the sector.

In addition to these measures, in December 2016 I announced the new Sheep Welfare Scheme as an amendment to the RDP. Under this scheme, farmers are required to choose from a menu of actions which aim to improve the overall welfare of their flock. These actions must be completed over a 12 month period, and in return the farmer receives a payment of €10 per breeding ewe. This important new support was introduced for a period of four scheme years, and I am glad to say that over €18m has issued on time to sheep farmers in respect of Year 1 of the Scheme.

The total amount of financial support received by sheep farmers under the main schemes operated by my Department over the past three years is as follows:

2015: €519,565,397

2016: €601,649,660

2017: €617,512,369

I am committed to ensuring that my Department continues to work to underpin the development of the sheep sector.

Common Agricultural Policy Negotiations

59. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the potential impacts of some of the proposals regarding the budget of the Common Agricultural Policy post-2020 contained in the Multiannual Financial Framework; the reason for those views; the steps he is taking to mitigate concerns; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23215/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) proposals for 2021-2027 were published by Budget Commissioner Gunther Oettinger on 2 May 2018. The proposal indicates a 5% cut in the CAP budget for the next MFF period of 2021 - 2027.

The proposal published by the European Commission is the initial MFF proposal. The final outcome will be determined by negotiations at EU level over the coming year. Achieving Ireland's priorities in these negotiations will be a key issue for the Government. In that context, I have been meeting with EU counterparts since January, most recently with the German and French Ministers, with a view to building consensus amongst farm ministers around the need for a strong CAP budget. Additional meetings are scheduled to take place with my counterparts from, Romania, Denmark and Belgium shortly, and I will be meeting Ministers from like minded Member States in Madrid tomorrow to discuss the protection of the CAP budget post 2020.

In addition to these formal bilateral meetings, I regularly meet my EU Ministerial colleagues at the monthly Agri-Fish Council meetings, and will have a further opportunity to discuss the future of the CAP at the forthcoming informal Council meeting in Sofia on 5 June with a further Council scheduled for Luxembourg on 18 June. I also keep in regular contact with Commissioner Hogan and his officials and met with him recently in Dublin on 26 April.

My Department officials are also having regular and constructive engagement with their EU counterparts.

Irish and European farm families play a vital role in the protection and enhancement of the environment and the production of food to the highest standards in the world. These high standards, and the family farm model, are part of the fabric of European values and EU citizens support these policies. We need farmers to take active steps to mitigate climate change, protect water quality and biodiversity, and improve their competitiveness. A strong CAP is needed to support these objectives, which benefit all of us.

The next stage in the CAP post 2020 process will be the publication of the legislative proposals, which are due on 6th June 2018. A number of elements relevant to the CAP, including in relation to the capping and targeting of direct payments and the inclusion of risk management tools in National Plans, have already been signalled in the MFF proposals. I have already indicated that I am prepared to consider these elements, subject to an assessment of the more detailed proposals when they emerge.

In that context, I look forward to engaging constructively with the Presidency, my European counterparts and the European Commission, to ensure that the next CAP continues to provide necessary support to the Irish and European agriculture sector. I would like to reassure the deputy that I will continue to seek a robust CAP budget to provide necessary support for farming and rural communities.

Common Agricultural Policy Negotiations

60. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the actions and negotiations he has held with his European counterparts to ensure no cut to the CAP budget in view of the recently announced proposal to cut the budget by 5%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23217/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) proposals for 2021-2027 were published by Budget Commissioner Günther Oettinger on 2 May 2018. The proposal indicates a 5% cut in the CAP budget for the next MFF period of 2021 - 2027.

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Beef Exports

61. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the efforts his Department made to develop beef access to China; and when he anticipates trade will commence. [23617/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The recent opening of the Chinese beef market is the result of years of cooperation and hard work on the part of my Department, the Irish Embassy in Beijing, Bord Bia, and the Irish beef industry. It is a hugely significant achievement for our industry, as well as an excellent endorsement of our world-class safety standards and product quality.

Three beef plants were approved by the Chinese certification authority in April. As part of my recent Trade Mission to China it was confirmed that a further three beef plants have met

the required standards for approval. I expect that they will be formally approved and listed by CNCA in the near future. This was a great result and reflects the on-going work in this area.

My Department has spent many years working closely with the Chinese authorities in order to secure this agreement. This work has included inward and outward trade missions, inspection visits, and various bilateral contacts with officials in relevant Chinese Ministries. Throughout the course of this work, my officials have developed a deep understanding of Chinese requirements. This understanding has been essential in devising procedures to satisfy the conditions of China's protocol.

A new Veterinary health certificate that will cover both beef and pigmeat comes into effect on 1st June. My officials continue to make progress on various technical issues and I expect the beef trade to commence during the summer. As I have previously stated, the role of the Government is to open up market access and to remove barriers to trade; the industry must then make its own decisions in relation to market priorities. But I hope that Irish beef exports will follow the same success that our dairy and pigmeat sectors have enjoyed in China to date.

Beef Data and Genomics Programme

62. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he is taking to ensure that good animals are not being dismissed under the technicalities of the BDGP scheme; the steps he is taking to ensure that the skill of assessing an animal by eye is not being dismissed by the technicalities of the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23643/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) forms an integral part of my Department's current Rural Development Programme (2014-2020). The BDGP is the current main support for the suckler sector and will provide farmers with some €300 million of funding over six years.

It was introduced by my Department with the clear and stated objective of using bovine genetics to address the progressive decline in key maternal traits within Ireland's suckler herd. The scheme aims to improve the profitability of the sector and reduce the carbon footprint of the herd. This is being achieved through the use of objective metrics which ensures consistency in evaluation of animals in terms of genetic merit. Currently there are 24,775 participants between BDGP I and II and a total of €42.8 million has been paid to participants for 2017 already.

The scheme's effectiveness is based on enhancing the genetic merits of the national suckler herd through clearly defined objective metrics for participants in the scheme. Key metrics such as the number of calves per cow per year, the calving interval, and age at first calving, docility, size and vitality, along with the prevalence of conditions such as scour and pneumonia are measured against agreed criteria. One of the most notable examples is the number of calves per cow per year, which has moved from 0.80 in 2014 to 0.87 for 2017; which across the entirety of the scheme herds represents an additional 40,000 calves for sale, with a weanling output value of some €30m to the participating beef farmers.

After years of decline in key maternal traits, genetic trend for replacement index has now turned around and is generating significant additional gains for participating beef farmers. Additionally, important validation work undertaken by Teagasc and the Irish Cattle and Breeding Federation (ICBF) on 46 participating commercial beef farms over the past 3 years has confirmed that 5 star cows are more fertile, lighter (thereby requiring less feed), produce more milk (a heavier weanling) and overall produce a heavier carcass for beef farmers. In effect the

key metrics of the scheme have provided clear evidence that cattle in the BDGP schemes are producing more benefits from less resources. This is consistent with the key objectives of the scheme, which is to breed more profitable and climate efficient cattle.

On this basis, I believe the scheme is an excellent example of utilising empirical evidence to enhance the quality and sustainability of the national herd.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Review

63. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the ANC review with regard to redesignation using a set list of bio-physical criteria; if the new approach must be introduced from January 2019; if the mapping of all current ANC lands has been completed; the specific actions that have been completed to date by officials; the outstanding actions in this regard; the timeframe for remaining actions; when he expects to submit final ANC data to the EU Commission in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23738/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Under EU regulation, Less Favoured/Disadvantaged Areas (with the exception of the islands) were to be replaced by newly designated Areas of Natural Constraints from 2018 with eligible areas being designated using a set list of bio-physical criteria such as soil drainage, texture and slope. However, as part of legislative amendments at EU level a proposal was made to extend the 2018 deadline to 2019 on an optional basis. This proposal has been approved at EU level, along with a number of other regulatory changes in what is referred to as the “omnibus proposal”.

My Department has commenced work on this project, and relevant technical experts are currently working on analysing the data in relation to the new criteria. Once this process is complete, the data will provide the basis for the identification of eligible areas in the ANC scheme from 2019 onwards.

In addition to the technical work on the biophysical criteria, the Regulation allows for a linked process of fine tuning to finalise the determination of what lands will be eligible under the new scheme. This fine tuning is based on objective criteria, with the purpose of excluding areas which are deemed to have met the thresholds for biophysical criteria but in which ‘significant natural constraints’ have been overcome by investment, economic activity, normal land productivity, production methods or farming systems. The process of sourcing and analysing data for this process is also underway.

In order to progress this work, my Department is in on-going communication with the EU Commission in relation to the accepted parameters and technical aspects of this project. Any change to the ANC scheme on foot of this process will require formal agreement with the EU Commission via an amendment of Ireland’s Rural Development Programme 2014 - 2020.

Common Agricultural Policy Negotiations

64. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he is taking at EU level to build support for a fully funded CAP post-2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23735/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) proposals for 2021-2027 were published by Budget Commis-

sioner Gunther Oettinger on 2 May 2018. The proposal, indicates a 5% cut in the CAP budget for the next MFF period of 2021 - 2027.

It should be noted that the proposal published by the European Commission is the initial MFF proposal. The final outcome will be determined by negotiations between Finance Ministers at EU level over the coming year. Any final agreement will require approval by the European Council and the European Parliament.

Achieving Ireland's priorities in these negotiations will be a key issue for the Government. In that context, I have been meeting with EU counterparts since January, most recently with the German and French Ministers, with a view to building consensus amongst farm ministers around the need for a strong CAP budget. Additional meetings are scheduled to take place with my counterparts from Romania, Denmark and Belgium shortly.

In addition to these formal bilateral meetings, I regularly meet my EU Ministerial colleagues at the monthly Agri-Fish Council meetings, and will have a further opportunity to discuss the future of the CAP at the forthcoming informal Council meeting in Sofia on 5 June with a further Council scheduled for Luxembourg on 18 June. I also keep in regular contact with Commissioner Hogan and his officials and met with him recently in Dublin on 26 April.

My Department officials also have regular and constructive engagement with their EU counterparts on this matter.

The next stage in the CAP post 2020 process will be the publication of the legislative proposals, which are due on 6th June 2018. In that context, I look forward to engaging constructively with the Presidency, my European counterparts and the European Commission, to ensure that the next CAP continues to provide necessary support to the Irish and European agriculture sector.

I would like to reassure the deputy that I will continue to seek a strong CAP budget in the upcoming negotiations.

Trade Missions

65. Deputy Pat Deering asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will report on his recent visit to China; and the outcomes for the Irish agrifood sector arising from this visit. [23621/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): From 13-18 May 2018 I led a large delegation of Irish food industry representatives on a trade mission to China and Hong Kong. As well as by official from my Department, I was accompanied throughout the trip by Bord Bia, Enterprise Ireland and senior executives from our leading companies in the beef, pigmeat, dairy and seafood sectors.

By way of background, Ireland's agri-food exports to China have increased roughly five-fold from around €200 million in 2010 to nearly €1 billion last year. China is now Ireland's third largest market overall. Dairy exports to China reached €667 million in 2017, and pigmeat exports have increased from €37 million to €100.3 million between 2012 and 2017. China is also a growing market for seafood and other food and drink exports.

This growth is, of course, very welcome. But the partnership between Ireland and China goes far beyond a transactional trading arrangement. This is about cooperation at multiple levels. Political visits in both directions at the very highest level, technical engagement between

officials providing assurance on food safety standards, and a programme of internships in my Department for Chinese veterinary officials have all played an important part in building trust and developing key relationships.

This mission was an opportunity to strengthen and develop those relationships. It is imperative that we continue raising the profile of Ireland as a source of quality food and beverages, and expand the range of exports into China and Hong Kong.

The Trade Mission itinerary was an extensive one that encompassed over 20 official engagements in Beijing, Shanghai, Hangzhou and Hong Kong. I had extremely productive meetings with the Minister for Agriculture and Rural Affairs Han Changfu, the Minister for Marketing Regulations, Zhang Mao and the Vice Minister for the General Administration of Customs, Zou Zhiwu. A number of additional Irish beef plants and one additional pork plant have now met the required approval standards to export to China. It is intended to complete the final administrative details to register other plants. We also held preliminary discussions around the issues of approval for additional plants as well as the prospect of sheep meat access.

In Hong Kong I raised the profile of Irish food at a Bord Bia prestigious cooking competition. I also met with the Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation, Dr. S.F. Leung. I took the opportunity to impart information on Ireland's unique agri-food sector including our commitment to strict food safety standards, sustainable production and high quality. Hong Kong has a population of almost 8 million consumers with relatively high disposable incomes.

We had a particular opportunity to present the Irish beef sector to potential buyers and distributors, following the recent success in obtaining access to the Chinese market. But we also wanted to build on existing trade links in other areas including dairy, pig meat and seafood. We wanted to highlight the credentials of Ireland's food and drink sector from a food safety, sustainability and authenticity perspective, in order to develop a unique selling point for Irish product.

A key engagement in the itinerary was our participation in the leading food event, SIAL, in Shanghai, where Irish companies had an opportunity to engage with buyers, distributors and manufacturers from China's food sector.

I also oversaw the signing of a memorandum of understanding, committing to an Irish presence at the China International Import Expo taking place this November in Shanghai. It is a great honour for Ireland to be invited by the Chinese authorities to participate in this November's event in Shanghai. This initiative which is being personally driven by the President of China, Xi Jinping, will have an expected attendance of 185,000 Chinese buyers. An event such as this, which is being promoted by the Chinese Government, offers the ideal opportunity for Irish food exporters to do business and enhance relationships.

I also held high level meetings with a number of potential investors in the food and agri tech sectors.

Overall this was an extremely successful mission, facilitating the development of our ever growing partnership with China. There is a clear ambition on Irish and Chinese sides to further build co-operation between Ireland and China on many levels, including trade. Against the backdrop of Brexit, market diversification is crucial for the Irish Agri-food sector. As markets and opportunities go there are none bigger than China and in that regard the Trade Mission represented a very good week indeed for Ireland's food exporters.

Suckler Welfare Scheme Payments

66. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the possibility of increasing the level of direct support for the suckler cow herd to €200 per cow under the next CAP will be investigated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23642/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Examination of appropriate measures to support all agri food sectors, including the suckler sector, is underway in my Department in preparation for the next iteration of the CAP. The measures adopted will be informed by stakeholder consultation on the needs of the sector to develop in an economically and environmentally sustainable way, as well as the available budget and structure of the new CAP when it is finalised.

Currently, the Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) is the main support specifically targeted for the suckler sector, which provides Irish beef farmers with some 300 million euro in funding over the current Rural Development Programme (RDP) period. This scheme is an agri-environmental measure to improve the environmental sustainability of the national suckler herd by increasing genetic merit within the herd.

My Department has rolled out a range of schemes as part of the 4 billion euro Rural Development Programme (RDP), 2014 - 2020. In addition to the BDGP, other supports which are available for suckler farmers under Pillar II of the CAP include GLAS, ANC's and Knowledge Transfer Groups. Suckler farmers also benefit from the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and Greening payments under CAP Pillar I.

I am strongly of the view that the current range of supports available to suckler farmers, together with ensuring market access to as many markets as possible, both for live animals and beef exports, are appropriate supports for the continued development of the sector. National Farm Survey data suggests that suckler farmers receive support equivalent to approximately €500 per suckler cow on average. I will continue to argue for as strong a CAP budget as possible, post 2020. In particular, I am committed to ensuring that suckler farmers continue to receive strong support in the next CAP. My view is that such payments should support and encourage suckler farmers to make the best decisions possible to improve the profitability, and the economic and environmental efficiency, of their farming system.

Suckler Welfare Scheme Payments

67. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a payment of €200 per suckler cow will be achieved in view of the passing of the motion supporting the suckler sector on 21 February 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23768/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Examination of appropriate measures to support all agri food sectors, including the suckler sector, is underway in my Department in preparation for the next iteration of the CAP. The measures adopted will be informed by stakeholder consultation on the needs of the sector to develop in an economically and environmentally sustainable way, as well as the available budget and structure of the new CAP when it is finalised.

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Animal Welfare Bodies

68. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the procedure followed by inspectors when they are required to visit properties in which there has been a report made by an organisation (details supplied) of suspected animal welfare abuses. [23624/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The procedures followed by authorised officers of my Department in carrying out inspections are governed by the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013. This is a modern Act and is the main legal instrument available to my Department to enforce animal welfare standards. This Act was passed following a constructive and extensive debate and all sides of this House engaged in the issues in a spirit of co-operation, significantly improving the Bill in the course of its passage.

In the context of the Deputy's question, particular attention should be paid to section 38 of the Act which establishes the framework within which officers of my Department carry out inspections. Before entering on land or premises, an authorised officer must have reasonable grounds to do so. Where the officer has reasonable cause for believing that an offence may be involved, the officer may exercise a range of powers in the interest of animal welfare for the purposes of enforcing the Act. The Deputy will notice that the Act places emphasis on the fact that the actions of the officer must be based on "reasonable grounds".

In the normal course, investigations are carried out by authorised officers of my Department based in 16 regional veterinary offices around the country. An investigation will invariably involve a visit to the land or premises concerned, a veterinary assessment of animals and the conditions in which they are kept and, where appropriate, gathering physical or documentary evidence; the person having possession or control of the animal or animals concerned will normally be interviewed. Formal notices requiring specific corrective actions may be issued. Whilst there is a strong focus by authorised officers on ensuring compliance, where breaches of the Act are encountered, a file is prepared and the responsible person is prosecuted should the evidence support this course of action.

It remains my policy that animal welfare standards are vigorously applied in a fair and even-handed manner. Those responsible for causing unnecessary suffering to animals or being negligent regarding animal welfare are and will continue to be prosecuted through the Courts; some 46 individuals have been successfully prosecuted in the past few years and a further 32

cases are in preparation or remain before the Courts. The determination of any particular case is of course, a matter for the trial court and it would be a gross violation of the separation of powers enshrined in the Constitution for the executive to interfere in this regard.

It continues to be my policy that neglect of, or causing unnecessary suffering to, animals is not acceptable in our society and my Department continues to enforce the law as does An Garda Síochána and the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the Dublin Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

Departmental Investigations

69. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the departmental investigation into the Killery fires in County Sligo; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that these aggrieved farmers have now taken action towards closing one of the county's busiest walking trails to the public until it is resolved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23616/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I welcome the opportunity to provide an update on the matter of illegal burning and how it relates to some of the key financial supports operated by my Department.

The range of area based schemes, available to farmers, are vital supports which help to underpin the continued development of a competitive and sustainable Agri-Food sector in Ireland. It is essential that my Department continues to implement a range of administrative verification checks including land eligibility checks to underpin the payment of some €1.6bn annually under such schemes.

The conditions relating to land eligibility under the Basic Payment Scheme are set out annually in the BPS Terms & Conditions Booklet as well as in the 2015 Guide to Land Eligibility booklet. These documents have been circulated to all applicants under the BPS.

Where land has been burned, it is not in a state suitable for an agricultural activity such as grazing or cultivation and therefore it is not eligible, except where controlled burning is carried out. It is specified in the BPS Terms & Conditions that under the Wildlife Acts, growing vegetation cannot be burnt between 1st March and 31st August of any given year, on any land not yet cultivated. Enforcement of the Wildlife Acts is a matter for the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

It was apparent during the closed season for burning in 2017 that there was widespread burning of vegetation. Accordingly my Department confirmed via Press release on 17th May 2017 that it was examining the illegal burning of land in relation to applications for payment under the BPS and other area-based schemes.

My Department actively investigated incidents of illegal burning using the most up to date technology and satellite imagery as well as field visits. Lands were identified that had been included in some 2017 BPS applications that were burnt after the permitted timeframe and would therefore be deemed ineligible for payment. In this regard some 57 parcels of land, including some on Killery Mountain, were identified as having been burned between 1 March and 31 August 2017. The majority of these fires took place on commonage land.

In general terms, where the area determined to have been burned exceeds 3% of the eligible area declared, an administrative penalty of 1.5 times the area burned is applied. Where the applicant provides appropriate evidence that he/she was not involved in the burning of the

affected lands, the administrative penalty may be waived. However, the burnt land remains ineligible for payment.

My Department wrote to the farmers concerned, including those on Killery Mountain, outlining that the burned land parcel(s) were ineligible for the purpose of BPS and had given rise to over-claims. The letters explained the options open to them including the right to a review and also requesting them to submit any relevant documentation.

All things being equal the lands burnt illegally in 2017 are likely to be eligible in 2018. Those affected were informed accordingly and the updated eligible areas were provided at the time of application to on-line BPS applicants.

My Department is not responsible for the investigation of the actual causes of illegal burning such as occurred on Killery Mountain. That responsibility lies with other state agencies such as An Garda Síochána and the Local Authorities.

My Department is however responsible for determining the eligibility of land under the BPS and other area related schemes. My Department has been in contact with 33 farmers in relation to ineligible land due to burning on Killery Mountain. 29 of these farmers have lodged an appeal with my Department on this issue. 25 of the appeals have now been decided, and my Department has communicated these decisions directly to the farmers concerned and advised them of their right of appeal to the Agriculture Appeals Office. A further 4 cases remain under review.

To date, 8 appeals, which relate to Killery Mountain, have been lodged with the Appeals Office.

This year Press Releases were issued in March, and again on 21st May, reminding farmers not to burn during the closed season, and not to include ineligible land in their applications. In addition my officials and I have held discussions with farmer representative bodies to further ensure clarity of message around this important issue.

Farmers and the wider public must be mindful of the risks and damage that burning can cause to human life and the environment and must take appropriate care.

The issue raised by the Deputy regarding walking trails is a matter in particular for the National Parks and Wildlife Service and my colleague the Minister for Culture Heritage and The Gaeltacht.

Live Exports

70. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the way in which live exports to Turkey have performed since his visit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23762/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Live exports play a vital role in Ireland's livestock industry by stimulating price competition and providing an alternative market outlet for farmers. The ongoing search for new markets is a priority for my Department, particularly in the context of Brexit.

Earlier this year I led a trade mission to Turkey, focussing on live exports. Ireland exported 30,000 cattle to Turkey last year, around 6% of their total import requirement. The trade delegation included the Irish live cattle export industry. I met key stakeholders involved in the

Turkish livestock sector, including Minister Fakibaba. Live cattle exports were central to our wide-ranging discussion.

I am extending an invitation to Turkish officials to visit Ireland to further discuss certification matters and enhance their understanding of Irish systems.

Exports of cattle to Turkey from January to April this year came to nearly 6, 000 head - a 27% increase from the same period last year.

My Department will continue to promote and maintain an environment in which live exports can continue in both an economic and sustainable manner, and with full regard to animal welfare.

Dog Breeding Industry

71. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the measures he is taking to curb the continuing practice of Irish puppies being illegally sold and shipped to the UK; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23214/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Trade within the EU of dogs is governed by EU law. Dogs moved commercially to another EU Member State from Ireland must be accompanied by an EU pet passport and a health certificate issued by a Department veterinarian, be microchipped and have a valid rabies vaccination. Before travel, dogs must undergo a clinical examination by an authorised veterinarian, who must verify that the animals show no obvious signs of disease and are fit to be transported.

The premises exporting dogs to the other EU Member States must be registered with my Department in advance of the export. These procedures ensure that only healthy dogs, over the age of 15 weeks, are allowed to be exported.

Exporters must also comply with national and EU law on the protection of animals during transport, while the transport of animals by air is also governed by the International Air Transport Association (IATA). Information about any breaches of these regulations can be provided to my Department, which will treat any information received in the strictest of confidence.

There is on-going co-operation between my Department, An Garda Síochána and Customs on the enforcement of export requirements and checks carried out at ports.

I would encourage anyone who has evidence of an illegal activity taking place to report this to An Garda Síochána.

The welfare of animals is regulated by the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013. The Act applies to all animals, whether kept for commercial, domestic, sport, show or other purposes and contains robust measures against the ill-treatment of animals. The Act also provides for the application of fines and imprisonment on conviction of an offence.

Brexit Issues

72. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the efforts he is making to seek new markets in the context of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23785/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The pursuit and development of new markets for Irish agri-food exports is of course an ongoing and central component of the strategic development of the agri-food sector, as evidenced by its placement right at the centre of Food Wise 2025, the industry's strategy for development over the coming decade. Indeed, this is all the more relevant after the UK's decision to leave the EU, which presents significant new challenges for the agri-food sector in particular.

Food Wise 2025 outlines the huge potential for sustainable growth in agri-food exports to new and emerging markets, particularly in Asia, Africa and the Gulf region.

In keeping with the priorities outlined in Food Wise 2025, I led a very successful Trade Mission in February 2017 to the Gulf Region. This covered the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. This was followed by an extensive Trade Mission to the US and Mexico in June. Both of these latter markets offer many elements that are very attractive to Irish exporters. The US is the largest food and beverage market in the world and has a population of 324 million people. Around 35 million Americans also claim Irish ancestry. Mexico has a population of 127 million, making it the eleventh-largest country in the world in population terms and the fifteenth-largest economy in the world, with projections that it will move into the top five by 2050.

Later in 2017, during a Trade Mission to Japan and South Korea in November, I was accompanied by 40 representatives of the Irish food sector, as well as by experts from my Department, the CEO of Bord Bia and senior representatives from Enterprise Ireland and Teagasc.

This was a very opportune time to bring a delegation of Ireland's food leaders to this part of the world, given that the EU has concluded a Free Trade Agreement with South Korea as well as concluding an Economic Partnership Agreement with Japan in December 2017. Japan and South Korea are markets of high potential for beef, pigmeat and sheepmeat exports, and so it is important that we raise the profile of Irish agri-food enterprises that already have access to these markets, and make progress in negotiating access for others.

Following a further Trade Mission to the US and Canada in February, earlier this month I led a Trade Mission to China and Hong Kong. This was an extremely successful mission in the development of our ever-growing partnership with China. For example, being present at one of the World's largest food trade exhibitions in Shanghai allowed me to reinforce the positive messages about the quality and sustainability of Irish agri-food exports to Asian buyers, and I was also fortunate to secure meetings with three senior Chinese Ministers and three Vice-Ministers over the course of the week. There is a clear ambition on both sides to further build co-operation between Ireland and China on many levels, including trade, and I will continue to do all I can to maximise this potential.

These and the other missions that my Department are planning for the latter half of 2018 will serve to enhance and improve our existing levels of market access in these destinations. It will also promote Ireland's reputation as a producer of high quality, safe and sustainably produced meat and dairy products.

The destinations are also in keeping with the market prioritisation exercise that was completed by Bord Bia in December 2017, at my request. This exercise identified opportunities in new and more mature markets, and will provide valuable market intelligence both for industry operators and policy makers as we continue to navigate the very uncertain environment created by Brexit.

My Department will continue to seek out and identify new markets, and I am ready to respond as appropriate to other opportunities that may arise.

Sheep Welfare Scheme

73. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the level of consultation he carried out prior to the introduction of electronic tagging for lambs; the rationale for introducing same; the steps he is taking to address clean sheep uncertainty at his Department's headquarters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23216/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The current National Sheep Identification system (NSIS) has been in place since 2010. It is widely accepted that the system is overly complicated, relying too heavily on the manual transcription of lengthy identification numbers of sheep at various stages of production.

My Department commenced a review of the current NSIS in 2015. The farm organisations and mart organisations were contacted and meetings took place in July and August of 2015. I also met stakeholders in the context of developing the Sheep Welfare Scheme and sheep EID was discussed in that forum.

The new rules are being introduced requiring all sheep sold from 1 October 2018 onwards to be identified electronically. The rationale for sheep EID includes the provision of a more robust sheep traceability system that will further support the development and sustainability of the sheep industry. This measure will significantly reduce the record keeping requirements for sheep farmers moving sheep to livestock marts, slaughter plants and export assembly centres. There is the potential of decreased cross compliance issues following the provision of a printed list to producers detailing the electronic tag numbers presented by them to marts and factories approved as Central Points of Recording (CPRs).

I will be providing a one off support measure of up to a maximum of €50 per keeper for the first purchase of EID tags. Electronic tag readers and associated software are included as eligible investments in the Targeted Agriculture Modernisation Scheme (TAMS) scheme to assist sheep farmers in flock management. The move to full EID and the inclusion of EID readers as an eligible investment in TAMS will make the recording of the movement of lambs off farm much more convenient and will greatly simplify the paperwork involved for sheep farmers.

This enhancement of the current sheep identification system will allow the sheep sector to further develop and build on its impressive performance supporting some 35,000 farm families directly in addition to supporting several thousand jobs indirectly in rural area.

The improved traceability system will assist in maintaining existing markets and in securing new international outlets for Irish sheep meat. Ireland has market access for sheep meat to 45 countries at present, compared to our beef access to 65 countries, and exports of dairy products to almost 180 countries. Opening new markets for sheep meat access, including potentially valuable markets such as the USA, Japan and, in due course, China is therefore a key concern, as some of these markets have identified lack of EID as a barrier to access.

The extension of EID to all sheep is a critical requirement to provide the required traceability demands across the market place, serving to protect public and animal health in line with the highest international standards.

With regard to the Clean Livestock Policy, my Department undertook an extensive consultation process with all stakeholders following which an agreement was reached and the policy was then introduced in all meat plants. It's primary objective is to ensure the safeguarding of public health, and my Department is greatly encouraged by the very positive impact which the policy has had on sheep cleanliness since it was implemented on 1st January, thus contributing to overall carcass hygiene. There was an initial learning phase after the introduction of the

policy and it is safe to say that all stakeholders are now aware of their responsibilities when it comes to producing safe wholesome food. My Department continues to consult with all stakeholders and participate with Teagasc in up- skilling where necessary.

Brexit Supports

74. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the operational details of the various Brexit loan schemes announced in budget 2018 for farmers, fishermen and food businesses in 2018; when each will open for applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23737/18]

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”.

I launched a new “Brexit Loan Scheme” on the 28th March 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 Scheme will be available to SMEs and mid-cap businesses. Given their unique exposure to the UK market, my Department’s funding ensures that at least 40% of the fund will be available to food businesses. The finance will be easier to access, more competitively priced (at a maximum interest rate of 4%), and at more favourable terms than current offerings. This will give Brexit-impacted businesses time and space to adapt and to grow into the future. The Scheme will remain open until 31st March 2020. This scheme was modelled on the Agriculture Cash Flow Loan Support Scheme which I made available to farmers in 2017.

I announced in Budget 2018 that my Department is considering the development of potential Brexit response loan schemes for farmers, fishermen and for longer-term capital financing for food businesses. These schemes are developed and delivered in cooperation with the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) and take time to develop and operationalise. Consideration and discussions are ongoing in this regard and I will announce further details on this as they become available.

While continuing to explore additional funding mechanisms, I also liaise with the main banks on issues relating to the agri-food sector, all of whom have specialised agriculture products available and have expressed a commitment to servicing the future financing needs of the sector.

Brexit Issues

75. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he is taking to safeguard the interests of the Irish agrifood and fishing sectors ahead of the UK’s move to leave the EU; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23736/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Brexit has the potential to have a very significant impact on the agri-food and fishing sectors throughout Ireland, particularly given their critical importance to the Irish economy. The regional spread of both sectors means they underpin the socio-economic development of rural Ireland.

It is for this reason that my 'asks' from the EU/UK negotiations are:

- Continued free access to the UK market, without tariffs and with minimal additional customs and administrative procedures;
- Minimisation of the risk from UK trade agreements with third countries; and
- Maintenance of current access to fishing grounds in the UK zone in the Irish Sea, Celtic Sea and north of Donegal and protection of Ireland's quota share for joint fish stocks.

The primary means through which the Government is seeking to safeguard the interests of the sectors ahead of Brexit is through the EU/UK negotiation process and our influence in that process.

I and my Department have been actively feeding into the DFAT coordinated whole-of-Government response and we are represented on all of the interdepartmental committees. The negotiations are now at a crucial stage, with the main focus resting on finding solutions for the avoidance of a hard border on the island of Ireland.

The UK commitment in the Joint EU-UK Report of last December to avoid a hard border was extremely important. At the Government insistence this commitment is now being translated into legal form in the draft of the Withdrawal Agreement, and we are currently working closely with our EU counterparts and the European Commission Task Force to achieve progress in the actions necessary to avoid a hard border on the island of Ireland and any disruption to trade in agri-food and fishery products..

In the meantime, we are continuing our work on assessing the impacts of Brexit, consulting with stakeholders and engaging with EU colleagues with a view to mitigating the potential impacts. On contingency planning, my Department is sharpening its focus on preparedness issues, and is currently engaged in a round of detailed discussions with industry stakeholders. These discussions are aimed at getting a fuller understanding of the potential financial, administrative and operational impacts of Brexit along the supply chain, as well as providing logistical data that will help the Department tailor its response in the negotiation process.

Since the Brexit vote, I have introduced a range of measures in the two most recent Budgets. These were aimed principally at helping reduce farm gate and business costs and also assist in reducing costs and improving competitiveness,.

The measures cover the introduction of low-cost loan schemes for farmers and SMEs, as well as new agri-taxation measures and increased funding under the Rural Development and Seafood Development Programmes.

In Budget 2017, I introduced measures to help reduce farm gate business costs, including a €150 million low-cost loan scheme, new agri-taxation measures and increased funding under the Rural Development and Seafood Development Programmes.

In the 2018 Budget I announced a €50m Brexit support package, which will comprise a number of initiatives. Firstly, in cooperation with my colleague, the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, I recently announced a new Brexit Loan Scheme aimed at providing affordable, flexible financing to Irish businesses that are either currently impacted by Brexit or will be in the future, at least 40% of which will be available to food businesses.

I am also considering the development of a separate loan scheme similar to the 2017 low-cost scheme, based on €25m funding from my Department to the Scheme. These measures are aimed at enhancing competitiveness within the sector.

I have also introduced supports for Bord Bia for investment in market insight and market prioritisation initiatives, which are aimed at identifying and developing potential diversification opportunities. I had already increased funding to Bord Bia by €14.5m since the Brexit vote, and a further €4.5 million was allocated in Budget 2018. I am of the view that a further effective way of mitigating the Brexit impacts is to expand our international trade opportunities, thereby reducing our exposure to the UK market.

To enhance product diversification, I have also allocated funding to support the development of the new National Food Innovation Hub, which will be located in the Teagasc Moorepark complex.

I have just returned from a Trade Mission to China and Hong Kong to develop our relationship further given that the Chinese beef market is now open to beef exports from Ireland. Among other meetings, I had a very good and productive meeting with my counterpart, the Chinese Minister for Agriculture.

This follows on from successful earlier trade missions to Canada and the USA in February 2018, Japan and Korea in November 2017, the USA and Mexico in June 2017, and Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in February/March 2017. I will, as part of the marketing effort, lead further trade missions in 2018 to promote Irish food and drink in key markets.

I wish to assure the Deputy that the Government remains very focused on supporting the agri-food and fishing sectors through the challenges ahead.

Animal Welfare

76. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the action taken to investigate breaches of section 32(7) of the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013 regarding the destruction and disposal of animals on farm properties in general and specifically in north County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23623/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Section 32 (7) of the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013 provides that-

The killing, destruction or disposal of an animal, animal product, animal feed or other thing relating to a farm animal shall, in the interests of -

- (a) disease control,
- (b) minimising the risk of disease, or
- (c) curtailing the spread of disease or a disease agent,

proceed, without delay, under the direction of an authorised officer notwithstanding that there might subsequently be a question of the determination of ownership or value of the animal, animal product, animal feed or thing or an issue relating to valuation and compensation in respect of it.

The purpose of this provision is to ensure that an animal being culled for a purpose related to disease control or eradication is dealt with speedily, even where there is a dispute, and that the risk posed is not exacerbated by delay.

The Deputy will be aware that this past year has been very difficult for those involved in livestock farming culminating with the severe weather event in March this year. An unfortunate

result was that on-farm mortalities as a result of the challenging weather situation would appear to have been higher than in some previous years with consequential pressure on knackeries which dispose of these casualties. The matter in North Wexford to which the Deputy refers was fully investigated by my Department's local Regional Veterinary Office. In the circumstances, there was substantive compliance with the regulations relating to disposal of carcasses on the part of the herdowner. A notice was served on the herdowner to underline his legal obligations and there are regular follow up inspections.

Brexit Issues

77. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the efforts being made to safeguard the fishing sector in the context of the work of the Barnier task force; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23784/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The potential impact of Brexit is the biggest challenge facing the Irish fishing industry with a real danger of loss of access to key fishing grounds and potential loss of fish quota shares. That is why the fishing sector has been a high priority for Ireland throughout the negotiations, and will continue to be so for this Government. I am determined to ensure that fisheries remain high on the Brexit agenda in the EU and that the interests of Ireland's fishing communities are fully safeguarded.

My continued overall objective is to ensure that fisheries are fully taken account of in the negotiations on the framework for a future EU-UK relationship. Ireland's key priorities in this regard will be maintenance of current access to fishing grounds in the UK zone and protection of Ireland's existing quota shares. I am satisfied that, thanks to our ongoing close engagement with Michel Barnier and the Task Force, as well as other relevant Member States, these priorities are fully reflected in the future relationship guidelines and in the transition arrangements as part of the Withdrawal Agreement.

The progress achieved to date has been welcomed by the Irish fishing industry and the importance attached to the sector by this Government was clearly demonstrated last month with a meeting between industry representatives, An Taoiseach, the Tánaiste and myself. In addition, the Tánaiste and I arranged for the sector to express their concerns directly to Michel Barnier during his recent visit to Dundalk.

Trade Agreements

78. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the latest Mercosur talks at EU level; the steps he is taking to protect Irish beef farmers by ensuring that beef does not form part of the final Mercosur deal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23739/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Ireland's position in relation to the EU-Mercosur trade negotiations is well-known, and has not changed. We have consistently stressed the importance of avoiding negative consequences for the Irish and EU agriculture sectors, and for the beef sector in particular.

This position has been reiterated many times, for example by myself and my colleague Andrew Doyle at Council of Agriculture Ministers meetings, and by other Ministers in the relevant EU Trade policy fora. It has also been done through direct contacts with Commissioners Hogan and Malmstroem, and by the Taoiseach at European Council and through his own direct

contacts, including with Commission President Jean Claude Juncker and French President Emmanuel Macron.

I myself have been very consistent in urging caution in the approach to these negotiations, and have expressed Ireland's very grave concerns about the offer of a beef tariff rate quota of 70,000 tonnes made by the EU to Mercosur last October, and our strong view that this should not be exceeded. I have been working closely with Member State colleagues in this regard, and have also remained in close contact with Commissioner Hogan on the matter.

There have been reports recently of agreement being reached in relation to other aspects of these negotiations. I would be very concerned if progress on these aspects were to lead to further concessions on beef.

I am aware that there will be a further round of negotiations in Montevideo in the week commencing 4th June. In this regard I continue to remain in close contact with European Commission counterparts and with Member State colleagues, and to press Ireland's concerns.

In an overall sense there is undoubtedly a need for continued vigilance in relation to the conduct of these trade negotiations, and I will continue to insist that they are handled appropriately, and in a manner that safeguards the interests of the Irish and European beef sector.

I will also continue to work very closely with Member State colleagues in this regard. In particular, I believe full account must be taken of the findings of the Commission's own assessment of the cumulative impact of trade deals on the agri food sector, and the potentially very damaging impact of Brexit on an already delicately balanced EU beef market.

Common Agricultural Policy Negotiations

79. Deputy Brendan Smith asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the outcome of the most recent discussions at the EU Agriculture Council in relation to the future funding of CAP; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23727/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The most recent EU Agriculture Council of Ministers where CAP Post 2020 was discussed was held on 19 March 2018. The main item on the Council agenda was the Presidency's draft council conclusions on CAP post 2020. The aim of the draft Council conclusions is to provide guidance to the European Commission on the drafting of legislative proposals, which are expected to be published on 6th June 2018.

In the event, it was not possible to achieve the required unanimous agreement for Council conclusions, however Presidency conclusions were issued covering a wide range of issues that arise in CAP reform.

The determination of budgetary ceilings, including those of the Common Agricultural Policy, is a matter for Finance Ministers. Nonetheless Minister of State Doyle who represented Ireland at the most recent Council of Agriculture Ministers indicated that the EU will need as strong a budget as possible to deliver on the many objectives of the Common Agricultural Policy. Ireland has been very consistent on this issue in recent months especially as discussions around potential increases in GNI contributions have been floated. The Taoiseach, in his address to the European Parliament in January 2018, has already indicated that Ireland is open to contributing more to the EU budget, but only if it is spent on policies that contribute to the advancement of the European ideal. I am also engaged in a round of discussions on the matter with counterparts in other member states.

The next stage in the CAP post 2020 process will be the publication of the legislative proposals. I expect this to happen in early June. In that context, I look forward to engaging constructively with the Presidency, my European counterparts and the European Commission, to ensure that the next CAP continues to provide necessary support to the Irish and European agriculture sector. I would like to reassure the deputy that I will continue to fight for a strong CAP budget in the upcoming negotiations.

Common Agricultural Policy Negotiations

80. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the proposals he put forward at the EU Agriculture Council in relation to the need to increase funding for CAP post-2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23728/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) proposals for 2021-2027 were published by Budget Commissioner Günther Oettinger on 2 May 2018. The negotiation of the framework is a matter for Finance Ministers, and the proposals will ultimately require the approval of the European Council and the European Parliament.

In so far as the funding for the Common Agricultural Policy is concerned, the proposal indicates a cut of around 5% for the next MFF period of 2021 - 2027.

I believe that European agriculture policies have delivered for Irish farmers and consumers and it is important that support continues to be provided to these programmes. Over the next few years farm families will be required to play a vital role in the protection and enhancement of the environment and the production of food to the highest standards in the world. These high standards, and the family farm model, are part of the fabric of European values. EU citizens have shown that they support this model.

We need farmers to take active steps to mitigate climate change, protect water quality and biodiversity, and improve their competitiveness. A strong CAP is a prerequisite if these objectives, which are in the best interests of all citizens, are to be achieved.

Member States are facing into a difficult negotiation, however, and a number have already indicated that they are not willing to provide additional funding for the MFF. From Ireland's perspective, the Taoiseach has already indicated that we are prepared to contribute additional funding, but only if critical policies are supported.

It should be noted that the proposal published by the European Commission is the initial MFF proposal. The final outcome will be determined by negotiations at EU level over the coming year. Achieving Ireland's priorities in these negotiations will be a key issue for the Government.

In that context, I have discussed with my counterparts at the EU Agriculture Council the importance of a strong CAP Post 2020 budget. I will continue to work with my colleagues across Europe on these matters as do my officials.

The next stage in the CAP post 2020 process will be the publication of the legislative proposals, which are due in early June. In that context, I look forward to engaging constructively with the Presidency, my European counterparts and the European Commission, to ensure that the next CAP continues to provide necessary support to the Irish and European agriculture sector. I would like to reassure the deputy that I will continue to seek a strong budget for CAP in the upcoming negotiations.

Citizens Assembly

81. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the recommendations contained in the Citizens' Assembly final report on how the State can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change; if the recommendations that refer to the agriculture sector will be included in the forthcoming sectoral mitigation plan for agriculture in particular that there should be a tax on greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23731/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I welcome the Citizens' Assembly Report on how to make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change and note in particular suggestions in relation to the agriculture sector. I look forward to the Oireachtas debate on this matter.

I was pleased to see that the agriculture recommendations are generally consistent with our approach to agri-policy. The recommendations include rewarding farmers for good environmental practices, which is consistent with the objectives of our Rural Development Programme. Two other areas recommended for support include organic farming and planting forests both of which are being supported by my Department.

Regarding the specific proposal of a tax on greenhouse gas emissions from Agriculture, the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) is conducting research into a global economic evaluation of greenhouse gas mitigation policies, including mitigation subsidies and taxes. Preliminary findings suggest that mitigation subsidies strike the best balance between unlocking the mitigation potential of agriculture and limiting the negative impacts on competitiveness and food security.

This work is expected to be published in the autumn and will form another key part of our consideration of the optimum policy options available to mitigating agriculture's impact on climate change.

Departmental Staff Data

82. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Taoiseach the number of staff employed in his Department in 2018 compared to 2017. [23877/18]

The Taoiseach: There are currently 209.5 whole time equivalent staff working in my Department. This compares to a figure of 203.5 whole time equivalent staff on 31 December 2017.

Defence Forces Personnel Data

83. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of new recruits in the Defence Forces since 2011; and the number of those recruits that are no longer in the Defence Forces. [23879/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The table sets out the number of general service recruits inducted for each of the years 2002 to 2017 inclusive. It does not include those in cadetships. Data collated by the military authorities does not track individual entrants but is collated in the aggregate. As set out in the table, it is not unusual to have more than 20% of any annual recruitment intake leave during induction training.

Year	Number Inducted	Discharged during Induction Training	Discharged as % of Intake
2017	615	171	28%
2016	590	126	21%
2015	307	62	21%
2014	444	106	24%
2013	394	85	23%
2012	639	111	17%
2011	513	57	11%
2010	118	2	1%
2009	-	-	-
2008	480	149	31%
2007	546	151	27%
2006	559	88	16%
2005	384	110	29%
2004	571	138	24%
2003	444	107	24%
2002	500	112	22%

Passport Applications Administration

84. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the problem with the passport tracking system (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23852/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): An applicant can track the progress of their passport application by entering the 11 digit application number into the tracker system. The applicant is also required to enter their category of application and the channel through which the application is submitted. The date provided by the tracker is a target date and not a guaranteed date. Information is updated daily and reflects the current target turnaround times. The Passport Service makes every effort to respond to as many customer queries as possible and in recent weeks, has allocated additional resources to the existing Communications Unit to respond to customer queries on phones, email and webchat. The vast majority of resources is allocated to checking and processing applications so that passports can be issued as quickly as possible. As the Deputy will be aware, this is peak season for the Passport Service and applicants are strongly advised to submit their application in good time before their planned travel date. Applicants are advised to check the Passport Service website, www.dfa.ie/passport for the most appropriate channel through which to submit their application. Adult applicants renewing their passport are strongly advised to check the online passport application service. The target turnaround time is 10 working days, plus postage time, but in 50% of cases, passports are issued in 5 working days (plus postage time).

Passport Applications Administration

85. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the ongoing delays in the issuing of passports in both the passport express system and the online application system; the measures is he taking to deal

with the delays; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23889/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The turnaround timeframe for a passport application will depend on the channel through which the application is submitted. The Passport Service provides a range of channels to Irish citizens wishing to apply for a passport. These include a postal application system, an online passport application service and in person counter application facilities in Dublin and Cork. The target turnaround time for applications made via the online passport application service is 10 working days plus postage. The majority of online applications are currently being processed within 5 working days, well ahead of target. The online service currently accommodates adult renewals and passport card applications and it is planned to further extend this service to other categories of renewals by the end of 2018. The average turnaround time for renewal applications submitted through Passport Express is currently on target at 15 working days. Other types of application, which are generally submitted through Passport Express, such as first time applications or applications to replace lost, stolen or damaged passports take longer. Such applications must undergo additional processes including security checks.

The Passport Service is currently in its peak season for passport demand with the vast majority of applications being received between February and August each year. Measures taken by the Passport Service to minimise the impact of peak time application volumes on turnaround times include the recruitment of additional staff and the use of targeted overtime in all Passport Offices for both temporary and permanent staff.

The Passport Service received sanction this year for 220 Temporary Clerical Officers (TCOs) for appointment to the Passport Offices in Dublin and Cork. TCOs are working together with permanent staff to process passport applications and to deal with the high number of enquiries being made through the Passport Service's various customer service channels.

The number of Full Time Equivalent staff permanently employed by my Department and assigned to the Passport Service stood at 322 at the beginning of the year. This compares to 310 Full Time Equivalent staff assigned to the Passport Service at the same point last year. In addition, over 20 additional permanent staff have been assigned to the Passport Service in 2018.

The continuous implementation of service improvements has been central to my Department's response to increasing application volumes. The Passport Reform Programme is delivering major upgrades to the passport service technology platforms and business processes as well as significant customer service improvements. The online passport application service will continue to make a major contribution to the effective management of high application volumes by allowing existing resources to be more effectively deployed within the Passport Service.

My Department has an extensive communications strategy to promote good practice amongst passport holders when planning to travel abroad. We regularly advise applicants:

- to check the validity of their passport in advance of booking travel;
- to apply at least 6 weeks in advance of their travel plans; and
- if they are eligible adults renewing their passport, to consider the online passport application service.

Middle East Issues

86. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade

if the recent violence and killing of Palestinians on the Israeli border will be discussed by him at the next EU Council meeting in June 2018. [23796/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The agenda of the Foreign Affairs Council on 28 May was determined before the climax of the violence in Gaza on 14 May, but I requested that the Council should nonetheless discuss these tragic and destabilizing events. Accordingly, it was discussed by Ministers in informal format over lunch. Many Ministers expressed their deep concern at the disproportionate use of force by Israel, and the appalling number of casualties. These concerns had already been expressed in EU and national statements, and at the UN Human Rights Council, where Ireland and others supported a successful resolution which will, inter alia, establish a commission of inquiry into these events. In my intervention I also argued strongly that events such as this will only recur if the vicious cycle in Gaza is not broken. It was essential not to despair of progress in Gaza but instead to redouble our efforts to find practical ways to begin to ease the situation there and provide hope. The inhabitants of Gaza must be able to see a political and economic perspective to end the blockade and end their isolation, otherwise more militant voices and groups will inevitably be strengthened.

The meeting also discussed humanitarian assistance, the difficult position of UNRWA, the recent move of the United States Embassy, and the prospects for a peace initiative by the US.

Brexit Issues

87. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his or the attention of his officials has been drawn to the most recent report to the European Parliament Constitutional Affairs Committee on the implications of a hard Brexit and invoking Article XXIV of the GATT which could allow for keeping an open border. [23792/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am aware of the report to which the Deputy refers, which is among several papers which have been commissioned by the European Parliament's Constitutional Affairs Committee to inform its ongoing deliberations on Brexit-related matters. Professor Federico Fabbrini of Dublin City University, the author of the report, also brought it directly to my attention and to that of my officials. It is a welcome addition to the body of research and analysis that is informing the Government's ongoing contingency planning and our overall approach to Brexit. This report provides an analysis of the default legal framework that would apply in what would be commonly referred to as a "disorderly Brexit" or "no-deal scenario", including those rules that would be applicable or might be invoked within the WTO and GATT framework. As concerns the specific reference to Article XXIV of the GATT, the author acknowledges that this has never previously been invoked and, given that it only covers some customs controls, it would also fail to address key issues that would entail the need for other checks and controls, such as animal health checks or sanitary and phytosanitary controls. It would therefore not prevent the emergence of a hard border.

This serves to further support the shared analysis of both the EU and the UK that the issues identified in the draft Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland as set out in the Withdrawal Agreement are those that need to be addressed within the context of avoiding a hard border on the island of Ireland. In this regard, the Protocol not only addresses the free movement of goods, but also provides for continued regulatory alignment in other areas which are fundamental to the avoidance of a hard border, including but not limited to EU sanitary and phytosanitary rules.

Brexit Negotiations

88. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has spoken to his French counterpart recently regarding Brexit negotiations. [23794/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Engaging with EU partners on the Brexit negotiations is an ongoing priority for the Government and I meet regularly with my counterparts, both individually and at the General Affairs Council (Art. 50). I met with my French counterpart, Minister Le Drian, most recently on 13 May when he visited Dublin. Minister McEntee also met with her French counterpart the following day in Brussels. Brexit was of course, one of the main issues discussed at both meetings. My meeting with Minister Le Drian was an important opportunity to thank him for the continued support of France for Ireland in the negotiations. I also updated the Minister on Ireland's perspective regarding the current state of play. We discussed the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland and I expressed Ireland's need to see real and substantial progress on agreeing the Protocol ahead of the June European Council. We agreed that the UK needs to come forward with workable proposals which could form a serious basis for seeking agreement on the text so that the entire withdrawal agreement can be concluded by October. I reiterated Ireland's readiness to consider any such proposals when they are forthcoming. During our meeting, Minister Le Drian assured me yet again of France's support for our position on the Irish-specific issues and their solidarity with the EU's position that *"nothing is agreed until everything is agreed"*. And so the Minister was clear that negotiations can only progress as long as all commitments undertaken so far are respected in full, including the Irish-specific issues.

The European Council is continuing to follow the negotiations closely and will return in particular to the remaining withdrawal issues, including the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland, at its next meeting in June when it will assess if satisfactory progress has been made and if not, what consequences this will have for the overall negotiations. It is therefore crucial that our engagement with EU partners continues, so that they remain fully aware of Ireland's position ahead of this important meeting.

Flood Risk Insurance Cover Provision

89. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance if he will report on his consultation with an organisation (details supplied) with regard to the provision of flood insurance to households and businesses located in areas in which demountable flood defences have been installed; the action points and timelines resulting from such consultation; when a household or a business located in an area with demountable flood defences can expect to receive flood insurance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23903/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am conscious of the difficulties that the absence or withdrawal of flood insurance cover can cause to homeowners and businesses, and that is one of the reasons the Government has been prioritising investment in flood defences over the last number of years.

However, the provision of insurance cover and the price at which it is offered is a commercial matter for insurance companies and is based on an assessment of the risks they are willing to accept and adequate provisioning to meet those risks. As Minister for Finance I have responsibility for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation, and neither I, nor the Central Bank of Ireland can interfere in the provision or pricing of insurance products or have the power to direct insurance companies to provide flood cover to specific individuals

or businesses. This position is reinforced by the EU framework for insurance which expressly prohibits Member States from adopting rules which require insurance companies to obtain prior approval of the pricing or terms and conditions of insurance products.

Insurance Ireland has informed me that its members, since 1 June 2014, have factored data on all completed flood defence schemes, provided by the OPW, into their overall assessment of flood risk. This information has been provided as part of the information sharing arrangement entered into between OPW and Insurance Ireland (Memorandum of Understanding). The nature of this arrangement is such that it has led to a greater availability of flood cover in previously higher risk areas. For instance, the most recent Insurance Ireland survey of approximately 85% of the property insurance market in Ireland indicates that of the completed defence schemes, 90% of policies in areas benefiting from permanent flood defences include flood cover, while there has been an increase from 66% to 77% of policies in areas benefiting from demountable defences including flood cover.

In addition, the Deputy should note that the Insurance Ireland/OPW working group, which the Department of Finance attends, now meets on a quarterly basis to support the above information flow and to improve the understanding of issues between both parties. The working group allows for the sharing of relevant data on completed flood defence schemes. In this regard, the OPW has also provided a significant amount of detailed data in relation to adequacy and resourcing of flood warning systems, and mobilisation, efficacy, maintenance and development of demountable defences to Insurance Ireland. A sub-group has also been set up to explore the technical and administrative arrangements that may allow for the further sharing of data.

One of the outcomes of these discussions is that the insurance industry has now acknowledged that they accept that the demountable defences meet the desired 1:100 year standard. However it still maintains the view that while demountable defences are effective where correctly deployed, there are significant interdependencies, including human intervention, which increases the risk of failure. This is subject to ongoing discussions.

Finally, it is important to note that a consumer can make a complaint to the Financial Services Ombudsman in relation to any dealings with a Financial Services or Insurance provider during which they feel they have been unfairly treated. In addition, individuals who are experiencing difficulty in obtaining flood insurance or believe that they are being treated unfairly may contact Insurance Ireland which operates a free Insurance Information Service for those who have queries, complaints or difficulties in relation to insurance.

Mortgage Interest Relief Application

90. Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin asked the Minister for Finance his plans to offer relief to homeowners that took out mortgages in recent years and now face potential interest rate increases. [23880/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): At present, there are no plans to provide specific additional income tax relief for mortgage payments, as the Government's priority is on reducing the income tax burden for low to middle income earners, while limiting the benefit for high earners and keeping the tax base broad.

As indicated in the last two Budgets, Mortgage Interest Relief is being phased out. The residual availability of the relief will taper out over the next three years before ceasing at the end of 2020. These developments reflect commitments contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government and the policy framework contained in the confidence and supply arrange-

ment negotiated by Government.

My Department published guidelines for the evaluation of potential tax expenditures in October 2014 (http://budget.gov.ie/Budgets/2015/Documents/Tax_Expenditures_Oct14.pdf). Drawing on economic evidence, these made clear that it is important that any policy proposal which involves tax expenditures should only occur in limited circumstances where there are demonstrable market failures and where a tax-based incentive is more efficient than a direct expenditure intervention.

A view that causes concern is that mortgage interest relief can effectively become priced-in to the purchase price of the property. It is therefore not considered efficient to allocate further funds solely to minimize mortgage interest payments. Instead, my focus is on a more general reduction of income tax across all income earners, with a particular focus on those on low to middle incomes as already indicated.

Motor Insurance Costs

91. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Finance if he will report on the working group established to review the factors which are influencing the increase in cost of motor insurance and for particular sectors, for example, taxi drivers in relation to both the availability and cost of SPSV insurance (details supplied); if new taxi drivers can obtain vehicle insurance at a reasonable price; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23908/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As Minister for Finance, I am responsible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation. Neither I nor the Central Bank of Ireland can interfere in the provision or pricing of insurance products, as these matters are of a commercial nature, and are determined by insurance companies based on an assessment of the risks they are willing to accept. This position is reinforced by the EU framework for insurance which expressly prohibits Member States from adopting rules which require insurance companies to obtain prior approval of the pricing or terms and conditions of insurance products.

However, it is acknowledged that pricing in the motor insurance sector has been subject to a lot of volatility in recent years and, indeed, the problem of rising motor insurance premiums was the main impetus for the establishment of the Cost of Insurance Working Group. Its *Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance* was published in January 2017. As the Deputy notes, the Report makes 33 recommendations with 71 associated actions to be carried out in agreed timeframes.

Work is ongoing on the implementation of the recommendations and there is a commitment within the Report that the Working Group will prepare quarterly updates on its progress. The Fifth Quarterly Progress Update was published on 11 May 2018: <http://www.finance.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/5th-Progress-Update-Q1-2018-Focus.pdf>. It shows that of the 50 separate deadlines set to date within the Action Plan, 40 have been met. Substantial work has also been undertaken in respect of the nine action points categorised as “ongoing”.

In line with the EU framework, the Cost of Insurance Working Group’s starting position on insurance for small public service vehicles was that it was not possible for it to make a recommendation on pricing as this is primarily a commercial matter for insurers. It did however recognise that this sector serves a social as well as an economic purpose, particularly in rural areas where public transport is less readily available. This position was acknowledged by the inclusion of Recommendation 10 in the Report of the Cost of Insurance Working Group on the

Cost of Motor Insurance. This recommended that the Advisory Committee on Small Public Service Vehicles should enter regular discussions with Insurance Ireland to explore solutions for drivers in the sector.

That Fifth Update Report mentioned above outlines the implementation of this recommendation. In summary, Insurance Ireland met with the Advisory Committee on Small Public Service Vehicles, commonly known as the Taxi Advisory Committee (TAC), on 22 May 2017. The TAC submitted the required report in relation to this meeting on 21 June 2017 to the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport. To date, no further meetings have taken place between the TAC and Insurance Ireland. However, the TAC has advised my officials that it is keeping itself informed of developments in the area, particularly through the industry representatives on the Committee, and future meetings with Insurance Ireland are a part of the TAC strategy. Recommendation 10 has been completed in the sense that the TAC has reported to the Minister for Transport. Notwithstanding this, my view would be that work needs to continue on this general issue. Therefore, I look forward to further engagements between the TAC and the insurance industry.

I would add that, notwithstanding the role of the TAC, the issues raised by the taxi sector were in the main similar to those affecting consumers generally, notwithstanding that there are risks that are specific to the sector. While there is no silver bullet to reduce the cost of insurance, I believe that cooperation and commitment between all parties can deliver fairer premiums for consumers, including taxi drivers.

I also believe that the work of the Cost of Insurance Group should better facilitate potential new entrants to the market. In this regard, I have been informed by my officials that Insurance Ireland has stated that there has been some increase in market capacity in relation to the provision of motor insurance for taxi drivers recently.

Finally, if a consumer is unable to secure a quotation on the open market, he or she may be in a position to avail of the Declined Cases Agreement (DCA) process. Under the terms of the DCA, the insurance market will not refuse to provide insurance to an individual seeking insurance if the person has approached at least three insurers and has not been able to obtain cover from them. Insurance Ireland also operates a free Insurance Information Service for those who have queries, complaints or difficulties in relation to obtaining insurance. The relevant contact details are: feedback@insuranceireland.eu or declined@insuranceireland.eu or 01-6761914.

Community Employment Schemes Supervisors

92. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 90 of 23 May 2018, the number of times the community sector high level forum or working group has met in the past six months; if it has considered the issue of pensions for community employment scheme supervisors in the past six months; if there is a timeline in place for the review group to finish its deliberation or to come to a decision in relation to the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23853/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I would refer the Deputy to my responses to PQ 54985/17 of 16 January 2018, and to PQ 13684/18 of 27 March 2018.

Office of Public Works Projects

93. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the position regarding a building project (details supplied) and the provision of new accommodation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23975/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Office of Public Works is finalising planning documentation and a Part 9 Planning application will be lodged in the coming weeks. Once the Planning process has been completed the OPW will then undertake the required Public Procurement Process for construction works.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

94. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if SNA support for the 2018-2019 school year for a person (details supplied) will be granted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23845/18]

95. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if SNA support for a person (details supplied) for a school year will be granted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23809/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 94 and 95 together.

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

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

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

SNA allocations to all schools can change from year to year as children with care needs leave the school, as new children with care needs enrol in a school and as children develop more independent living skills and their care needs diminish over time.

I was very pleased to announce on Friday 18th May that 800 additional Special Needs Assistants will be allocated for the beginning of the next school year, with a further 140 expected to be allocated by the end of the year.

I was also pleased that the announcement was in keeping with the commitment made last year to inform schools of the September 2018 allocation before the end of May. In making this announcement at this time the Department is providing certainty to schools, parents and of course SNA's in relation to the posts that will be in place for the coming school year.

By the end of this year, there will be a total of 15,000 Special Needs Assistants working in our schools, a 42% increase on 2011.

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

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

Where a school has received its allocation of SNA support for 2018/19, but wishes new enrolments or assessments to be considered, which were not taken into account when the initial allocation was made, they may continue to make applications to the NCSE. The closing date for receipt of any appeals in regard to SNA allocations is Friday, 28th September 2018.

As this question relates to an individual child I have referred the question to the NCSE for their direct reply.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

96. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to provide an ASD unit at a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23810/18]

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

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

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

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

This network includes 130 ASD early intervention classes, 641 primary ASD classes and 277 post-primary ASD classes in mainstream schools and 125 Special Schools.

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

The NCSE, in looking to open special classes in certain areas, must take into account the present and future potential need for such classes, taking account of location, sustainability, the accommodation and accessibility of schools in the area and the number of special classes,

already in schools in the area.

While it is not always possible to ensure that a special class placement will be available in a child's local school, the NCSE are satisfied that there are sufficient ASD special class placements to meet the projected need for students in Co. Longford in the forthcoming school year.

The school referred to by the Deputy currently operates an ASD Early Intervention class and a Primary ASD Special Class.

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

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

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

Special Educational Needs Staff

97. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a school (details supplied) will be allocated the necessary level of special needs assistants it requires; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23815/18]

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

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

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

SNA allocations to all schools can change from year to year as children with care needs leave the school, as new children with care needs enrol in a school and as children develop more independent living skills and their care needs diminish over time.

I was very pleased to announce on Friday 18th May that 800 additional Special Needs Assistants will be allocated for the beginning of the next school year, with a further 140 expected to be allocated by the end of the year.

I was also pleased that the announcement was in keeping with the commitment made last

year to inform schools of the September 2018 allocation before the end of May. In making this announcement at this time the Department is providing certainty to schools, parents and of course SNA's in relation to the posts that will be in place for the coming school year.

By the end of this year, there will be a total of 15,000 Special Needs Assistants working in our schools, a 42% increase on 2011.

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

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

Where a school has received its allocation of SNA support for 2018/19, but wishes new enrolments or assessments to be considered, which were not taken into account when the initial allocation was made, they may continue to make applications to the NCSE. The closing date for receipt of any appeals in regard to SNA allocations is Friday, 28th September 2018.

As this question relates to an particular school I have referred the question to the NCSE for their direct reply.

School Accommodation Provision

98. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if funding will be provided to a school (details supplied) for a new extension incorporating a general purpose room and new accommodation for physical education and a classroom; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23846/18]

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

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

School Funding

99. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if grant aid or support will be provided for a school (details supplied) in view of the granting of planning permission for new housing developments in the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23848/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy will be aware my Department approved funding for the school referred to, in June 2016, to provide additional mainstream classroom accommodation to cater for an increase in enrolment which resulted in the appointment of an additional mainstream teaching post.

In that regard, it is open to the school to submit a further application in the future, under my Department's Additional School Accommodation (ASA) Scheme, should the school enrolment position result in the appointment of a further mainstream teaching post, and where it is deter-

mined that there is a deficit in mainstream teaching accommodation.

I wish to advise the Deputy that the external works referred to are eligible to be considered for funding under the Summer Works Scheme, the purpose of which is to devolve funding to individual school authorities to facilitate carrying out small and medium scale works that will improve and upgrade existing school buildings and the grounds within the school site area.

The Department intends to engage with the relevant education partners in relation to giving schools a better lead-in period for planning and delivering projects under the summer works scheme from 2019 onwards. While the Summer Works Scheme is hugely successful in enabling small scale refurbishment works to be done on a devolved basis, the Department considers that the operation of the scheme could be improved by providing a better lead-in period for schools rather than in Quarter 2 as in previous years. This will also help ensure that works done under the Summer Works Scheme fit better with any wider refurbishment/energy retrofit plans that may be done at schools under the increased funding provided in the National Development Plan. The engagement with education partners will commence shortly and will assist in developing a better timeline for the planning and delivery of summer works projects for 2019 onwards.

It remains open to the school to use its minor works grant, which all primary schools received last November, to carry out works in full or on a phased basis, as that grant permits, if the school considers the works to be a priority.

Special Educational Needs Staff Contracts

100. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a reply will issue to concerns raised by a SNA in correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23854/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As you will be aware, I was very pleased to announce on the 18th May 2018 that 800 additional Special Needs Assistants will be allocated for the beginning of the next school year, with a further 140 expected to be allocated by the end of the year.

I was also pleased to be able to make the announcement in May, in keeping with the commitment made last year to inform schools of the September 2018 allocation before the end of May. In making this announcement at this time the Department is providing certainty to schools, parents and of course SNA's in relation to the posts that will be in place for the coming school year.

By the end of this year, there will be a total of 15,000 Special Needs Assistants working in our schools, a 42% increase on 2011. The National Council for Special Education notified the schools of their SNA allocations on 18th May and the details of these allocations are now published and available on their website.

The NCSE has completed a comprehensive review of the SNA scheme, in consultation with other relevant Departments and State Agencies, including the National Disability Authority (NDA), to identify the most appropriate form of support options to provide better outcomes for students with Special Educational Needs, having regard to the significant amount of State investment in this area.

The NCSE has submitted that full and final report of the SNA Comprehensive Review and its contents are currently under consideration. The qualifications of SNAs have been considered

as part of this Review.

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

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

Where a school has received its allocation of SNA support for 2018/19, but wishes new enrolments or assessments to be considered, which were not taken into account when the initial allocation was made, they may continue to make applications to the NCSE. The closing date for receipt of any appeals in regard to SNA allocations is Friday, 28th September 2018.

SNA allocations to all schools can change from year to year as children with care needs leave the school, as new children with care needs enrol in a school and as children develop more independent living skills and their care needs diminish over time.

In terms of the education provision for children who have autism, the Department has always recognised the importance of early intervention. Children with autism can be enrolled in an early intervention class from the age of 3.

Children in early intervention classes benefit from a reduced pupil-teacher ratio of 6:1. Class teachers are fully qualified and have access, through the Special Education Support Service, to training in a range of autism-specific interventions. Each class will have a minimum of 2 Special Needs Assistants.

Children with disabilities now have better access to pre-school services under a new Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) programme of supports, which was announced, on 15th June 2016, by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs.

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

Details of the supports which are available under AIM can be found at www.preschoolaccess.ie which contains comprehensive information on the access and inclusion model and on how to apply for the new schemes and supports. As Lorraine is attending a private pre-school through the ECCE programme, questions relating to the AIM supports should be addressed to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

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

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

Where a Special Needs Assistant with a minimum of one year's service is made redundant he/she is deemed to be a member of the SNA supplementary panel and can apply for other SNA posts. If a Special Need Assistant does not want to take up another position he/she can opt out

of the panel and receive a Redundancy payment. Circular 0034/2018 (Recruitment of SNA's – Supplementary Assignment Arrangements for 2018/2019 school year) refers.

School Accommodation Provision

101. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the need for an extension to a school (details supplied) will be examined in view of increased pupil enrolment for September 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23861/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm to the Deputy that the school in question recently wrote to my Department advising that it expects enrolments to increase in the coming academic year 2018/2019.

My Department contacted the school and advised the Principal that should enrolment increase to a level that would warrant the appointment of an additional teacher, it is then open to the school to submit an application for additional accommodation, under the Additional Accommodation Scheme, should the school's existing accommodation not be capable of accommodating the additional teacher. An application form can be accessed on www.education.gov.ie.

Defibrillators in Schools Provision

102. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will report on his discussions with the Department of Health on plans to place a defibrillator in all schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23862/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The position is that under the provisions of the Education Act 1998, the Board of Management is the body charged with the direct governance of a school.

The decision to install a defibrillator is made at local school level and is a matter for the Board of Management of each individual school.

I understand that a National Steering Group on Out of Hospital Cardiac Arrest was established in 2017 and is representative of health professionals, patient groups, healthcare providers and other sectors. It aims to strengthen the chain of survival for cardiac arrest. The report from the group, due in 2018, will provide advice to the HSE and the Department of Health on the most effective ways of improving survival for cardiac arrest including training for cardio-pulmonary resuscitation, building on the Community First Responder Programme and making public access defibrillators more easily accessible in community settings and in schools.

I will carefully consider any findings that may emerge from the work of this Group that are relevant to my Department.

Emergency Works Scheme Applications

103. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason an application for emergency works by a school (details supplied) was not supported; and the reason they were not successful. [23870/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school to which the Deputy refers has appealed my Department's decision not to approve an emergency works grant application. This appeal is under consideration and a decision will issue to the school authority as soon as possible.

School Transport Eligibility

104. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on a matter in relation to a child (details supplied) regarding transport. [23876/18]

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

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

Under the terms of my Department's School Transport Scheme for Children with Special Educational Needs, children are eligible for transport where they are attending the nearest recognised school that is or can be resourced to meet their special educational needs.

Special Schools funded by my Department are intended to cater for children and young persons with special educational needs from 4 years until the end of the school year in which they reach their 18th year.

At that point, the Department of Health/Health Service Executive assumes direct responsibility for young adults with special educational needs who are over 18 years.

Accordingly, the person referred to by the Deputy is not eligible for school transport under the terms of the above scheme.

Schools Building Projects Status

105. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a new school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23881/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The building project to which the Deputy refers is currently at construction stage. The school issued the Letter of Acceptance to the contractor on 28th March 2018. The expected delivery date is Quarter 1 of 2019.

School Accommodation

106. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of schools in County Kildare which have prefabs on site. [23882/18]

107. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of schools in County Kildare which have more than one prefab. [23883/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions

Nos. 106 and 107 together.

I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department does not hold information in relation to the number of schools in County Kildare that have prefabs on their school sites, as the school authorities may have provided prefabs from their own funds. However, I am in a position to advise the Deputy that my Department is providing grant to 17 schools in County Kildare for rental of temporary accommodation. Of these 17 schools, 13 schools have more than 1 prefab rented.

In general, prefabs are necessary where a school is allocated an extra teacher, but does not have the physical accommodation to facilitate the allocation. In the last 2 years, 5,000 extra teachers have been hired across the country.

School Placement

108. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a school place will be provided for a child (details supplied) in September 2018. [23891/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that in relation to the ongoing review of school planning areas generally, my Department is currently reviewing the position in relation to primary school provision for the school planning area in question and my officials are currently engaging directly with the primary schools in the area.

In relation to school admissions, parents can choose which school to apply to and where the school has places available the pupil should be admitted. However, in schools where there are more applicants than places available, a selection process may be necessary.

This selection process and the enrolment policy on which it is based must be non-discriminatory and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants. However, this may result in some pupils not obtaining a place in the school of their first choice. Section 29 of the Education Act, 1998 provides for an appeal by a parent or guardian to the Secretary General of my Department, or in the case of an Educational Training Board (ETB) school to the ETB in the first instance, where a Board of Management of a school, or a person acting on behalf of the Board, refuses to enrol a student in a school, expels a student or suspends a student for 20 or more days in any school year. Further information on the Section 29 appeals process is available on the Department's website www.education.ie.

The Education Welfare Service of the Child and Family Agency (Tusla) is the statutory agency which can assist parents who are experiencing difficulty in securing a school place for their child. The EWS can be contacted at 01-7718500.

Gaeltacht Policy

109. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the spending on the policy on Gaeltacht education for 2018; and the projected spend on the implementation of the policy for 2019. [23895/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In budget 2018, the Government doubled the investment being made in Gaeltacht education. A budgetary allocation of €2.3m was provided for the implementation of the Policy on Gaeltacht Education in 2018. The estimated expenditure in 2018 on the Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022 is largely in

line with projections.

The 2019 budget will be determined through the usual estimates process and announced in the context of budget 2019.

Education Policy

110. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the projected cost of producing a comprehensive plan on the strategic development of Irish medium education at preschool, primary and post-primary level across the State. [23896/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department is currently working with the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht on a 5 year Action plan for Irish 2018 – 2022 as part of the implementation of the 20 year Strategy for the Irish Language. The Plan will include an Education Chapter outlining a range of actions across a number of sections within my Department including the Curriculum & Assessment Policy Unit, Teacher Education Section, the Inspectorate, the Forward Planning Unit, the Gaeltacht Education Unit and the School Governance Section. As the plan has not yet been finalised and it is not possible to accurately cost it at the moment.

My Department published its Policy for Gaeltacht Education in October 2016. A dedicated Gaeltacht Education Unit, *An tAonad um Oideachas Gaeltachta*, was established in the Department and a wide range of actions have commenced as part of implementation of that policy. Implementation of the Gaeltacht Education Policy will cost €2.3m in 2018.

An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG) plans and co-ordinates the provision of textbooks and resources to support learning and teaching through Irish. Staffing has been increased to allow for additional work arising from the Policy on Gaeltacht Education and increased funding has allowed for the convening of more regional workshops and the commissioning of relevant research. Funding has also been made available to support the development of an integrated Irish programme for English-medium primary schools to support the Primary Language Curriculum. COGG will receive €1.7m in 2018.

A new phase of the Séideán Sí project to update resources already produced to reflect the curricular changes in the Primary Language Curriculum is expected to cost €500,000 over the period 2018-2020.

School Accommodation Provision

111. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the autism unit in a school (details supplied) will open in September 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23900/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department is in receipt of an application from the school referred to for additional accommodation including the provision of ASD accommodation. My Department has been liaising with the school authority in this matter and a decision will issue to the school shortly.

Teacher Career Breaks

112. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a matter in relation to a person (details supplied) being classed as a new entrant teacher will be examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23911/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The person to whom the Deputy refers returned to teaching following the enactment of the Public Service Superannuation (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2004. The Act changed the superannuation terms of new entrants to the public service appointed on or after 1 April 2004. In broad general terms the Act defines a new entrant as a person who (i) commences public service employment for the first time on or after 1 April 2004, or, (ii) a person who takes up employment in the public service where his/her previous public service employment ended more than 26 weeks prior to the commencement of the new employment. The person in question had a break in teaching service between September 2004 and September 2005. Accordingly on taking up her teaching employment in 2005 she became a new entrant in accordance with the terms of the 2004 Act. The Pension Unit of my Department has previously responded to the nominated legal representative with a detailed reply as to the reasons the person in question is classified as a new entrant.

My Department is satisfied that it has acted appropriately and in accordance with the legislation in place at the time.

School Placement

113. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which a second level special needs place has been made available for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23957/18]

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

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

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

The enrolment of a child to a school is a matter, in the first instance, for the parents of the child and the Board of Management of a school. My Department has no role in relation to processing applications for enrolment to schools.

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

Alcohol Sales Legislation

114. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the relevant section of legislation which deals with the issue of pub and hotel licences in cases in which if they have not been trading for a period of five years, if the licence expires or if there are procedures

in place to revalidate the licence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23904/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, I am not in a position in my capacity as Minister for Justice and Equality to provide legal advice in response to Parliamentary Questions. However, the general position is that section 2 of the Licensing (Ireland) Act 1902 (as amended), provides that where premises have not been licensed during the preceding year but had been licensed at any time during the previous five years, a new licence may be issued in respect of such premises. Such a licence will be issued by the Revenue Commissioners on foot of a certificate granted to the applicant by the Circuit Court. This renewal provision does not apply, however, in cases in which the licence had lapsed due to a breach of the Licensing Acts, or had been extinguished in order to permit the granting of a retail licence to new premises.

Commencement of Legislation

115. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the timeframe for the commencement of section 30 of the Data Protection Act 2018; the issues surrounding the delay on the commencement of the section including legal advice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23927/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): During discussions on section 30 in the Select Committee, and once again during Report Stage discussions, I pointed out that the processing of personal data for marketing and profiling purposes takes place under the so-called “legitimate interests” ground in Article 6.1(f) of the GDPR, and that the Court of Justice had already addressed the issue of whether national law could impose additional conditions on processing carried on under the corresponding provision of the 1995 Data Protection Directive in Joined Cases C-468/10 and C-469/10. In its ruling, the Court of Justice had underlined the importance of free movement of personal data under the 1995 Directive and concluded that Member States were not permitted to impose additional conditions that would have the effect of amending the scope of any of the grounds in Article 7 of the Directive. Those grounds are now set out in Article 6.1 of the GDPR.

The Office of the Attorney General has now advised my Department that insofar as section 30 purports to make it an offence for any company or corporate body to process the personal data of a child for the purposes of direct marketing or profiling, such a prohibition appears to go beyond the margin of discretion afforded to Member States in giving further effect to the GDPR and would conflict with Article 6(1)(f), read in conjunction with Recital (47). Put simply, it is not an option for a Member State to unilaterally prohibit a category of processing activities which might otherwise be lawful under Article 6.1(f). Since commencement of section 30 could, therefore, give rise to a substantial risk of infringement proceedings against the State pursuant to Article 258 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, I have requested my Department to clarify the matter with the European Commission.

Apart from this apparent conflict with the GDPR, the Office of the Attorney General has pointed out that section 30 gives rise to difficulties under Article 38.1 of the Constitution and under Article 7 of the European Convention on Human Rights. Article 38.1 provides that no person shall be tried on any criminal charge save in due course of law. In order for a domestic offence provision to comply with Article 38.1, it must be clear, precise and foreseeable in its application. This is not the case here since it is not clear what might constitute the processing of personal data of a child for the purposes micro-targeting. Whereas the GDPR refers to both direct marketing and profiling, the concept of micro-targeting does not appear in the GDPR and its scope remains uncertain and undefined. It is also a requirement under Article 7 of the Con-

vention that offence provisions must be sufficiently clear and precise so as to enable individuals to ascertain which conduct constitutes a criminal offence and to foresee the consequences of engaging in such conduct.

Notwithstanding the difficulties concerning section 30, the Deputy will be aware that I have made provision in section 32 for the drawing up of codes of conduct intended to contribute to proper application of the GDPR with regard to the processing of the personal data of children for the purposes of direct marketing and creating personality and user profiles. I regard the drawing up of such a code as an urgent priority and I urge all relevant stakeholders, including bodies that represent the interests of children, to support that objective and to make appropriate input into its development and implementation.

State Claims Agency

116. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the stage of each case the State Claims Agency is dealing with, by programme, relating to the various cancer screening programmes; the notifications it has received from the HSE or the programmes themselves regarding correspondence received from persons or their legal representatives regarding a possible claim; the approach of the agency in dealing with these cases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23984/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The State Claims Agency (SCA) has a statutory remit to manage personal injury claims, including claims in respect of clinical negligence, on behalf of Delegated State Authorities (DSAs) one of which is the Health Service Executive.

The SCA states that this request for information is broader than cancer misdiagnosis claims, which have recently been reported in previous parliamentary questions. This reply includes clinical and personal injury 'general' claims which can relate to service users, staff, and members of the public.

The table shows all claims under active management by the SCA under the National Screening Service on the National Incident Management System (NIMS).

HSE National Screening Service	Clinical/General	Status Updated	Count
Breast Check	Clinical	Claim under investigation	3
Breast Check	Clinical	Claim Litigation	2
Breast Check	General	Claim under investigation	3
Cervical Check	Clinical	Potential Claim under review	1
Cervical Check	Clinical	Claim under investigation	12
Cervical Check	Clinical	Claim Litigation	1
Cervical Check	Clinical	Trial	2
Cervical Check	Clinical	Claim conclusion started	4
Cervical Check	General	Claim under investigation	1
Bowel Screen	Clinical	N/A	0
Bowel Screen	General	N/A	0
Grand Total			29

The SCA states that, as at 28/05/2018, there are 29 cases under active management (28 claims, 1 potential claim) with respect to the national screening programmes.

Of these, 8 are associated with BreastCheck, 21 with CervicalCheck and 0 with Bowel-Screen.

It is important to note that these cases are both clinical and non-clinical (general) in nature and include cancer misdiagnosis claims.

The SCA states that 38 cases (36 claims and 2 potential claims) have been notified to it with respect to the national screening programmes/centres, since their delegation.

Of these, 27 relate to clinical care and 11 are non-clinical (general) in nature. Of the 38, 29 remain active on the National Incident Management System as at 28/05/2018, as shown in the table above.

The SCA's claims management objective is to act fairly, ethically and compassionately in its dealings with people who have suffered injuries and/or damage and who take legal actions against the State or State bodies, and their families, while acting in the best interest of taxpayers in matters of personal injury and property damage litigation.

The SCA remains committed to resolving cases relating to CervicalCheck in line with the principles outlined by the Government earlier this month, expediting resolution of these cases in a sensitive manner, working co-operatively with the co-defendant laboratories, utilising mediation wherever possible and placing a high priority on treating the people who have made the claims, and their families, with dignity and compassion.

Primary Care Reimbursement Service Payments

117. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health when staff at UHW will be approved with a login for the PCRS system to set up patients for the reimbursement for the Free-Style Libre sensors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23808/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

National Centre for Medical Genetics

118. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of new referrals and new PKU patients at the National Centre for Inherited Metabolic Disorders in each of the years 2015 to 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23811/18]

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

Hospital Staff Data

119. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff and vacancies at the National Rare Diseases Office at the Mater Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23812/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been re-

ferred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Health Services Funding

120. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the funding allocated for the National Rare Diseases Office in each of the years 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018; his plans for resources for the office in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23813/18]

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.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

121. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if the decision to take Versatis patches off the drug payment scheme will be reversed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23816/18]

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: 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

122. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the terms of reference used for the assessment of need standard operating procedure document which has recently replaced the standards for the assessment of need document; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23817/18]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities

123. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the person or body that set out the terms of reference for the assessment of need standard operating procedure document; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23818/18]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities

124. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the location the terms of reference for the assessment of need standard operating procedure document can be found; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23819/18]

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.

Disability Support Services

125. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the members of the national disability children and families team; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23820/18]

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.

Disability Support Services

126. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health when the national disability children and families team was founded; the criteria applied; the person or body that issued the instructions in relation to establishment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23821/18]

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 Data

127. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the number of members on the social care management team; the criteria that were used for the selection of the members; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23822/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy on this matter.

Services for People with Disabilities

128. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the organisations consulted during the process to produce the assessment of need standard operating procedure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23823/18]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities

129. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the parental knowledge, expertise and advice sought during the process of producing the assessment of need standard operating procedure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23824/18]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities

130. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the reason, when the assessment of need standard operating procedure document was approved on 22 November 2017, that parents are unfamiliar with many of the changes and compliance procedures it outlines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23825/18]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities

131. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the reason the assessment of need standard operating procedure is not readily accessible to the public; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23826/18]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities

132. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the person charged with the sole responsibility of overseeing the review, update and modification of the assessment of need standard operating procedure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23827/18]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities

133. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the reason the attention of parents was not drawn at a much earlier stage to the assessment of need standard operating procedure; the reason its existence was not made public knowledge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23828/18]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities

134. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the schedule of meetings regarding the review of the standard operating procedure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23829/18]

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 Transfers

135. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal can expect to be transferred to St. James's Hospital, Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23830/18]

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

Disability Services Provision

136. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of children aged between 0 and 18 years of age in County Wexford that are awaiting treatment from disability services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23834/18]

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.

Disability Services Data

137. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the average caseload of therapists working with children in County Wexford within disability services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23835/18]

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.

Vaccination Programme

138. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the reason cases of suspected adverse reactions to the HPV vaccine Gardasil previously listed as convulsions were recently amended on the HPRA line listing report to seizures; if these amendments were notified to the EMA EudraVigilance database; if the attention of the case ID patient holder is drawn to such changes to their records; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23836/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The information that the Deputy seeks is not readily available. Therefore, I have asked the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) to investigate the matter and reply directly to the Deputy.

It is important to reiterate that the HPRA and the European Medicines Agency continually monitor adverse events to vaccination. HPV is one of the most closely studied and monitored medicinal products. The vast majority of reports received by the HPRA have been consistent with the expected pattern of short term adverse side effects for the vaccine, as described in the product information. Mild and temporary reactions to any kind of vaccination are not unusual.

Vaccination Programme

139. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health his views on the long-term protection provided by the HPV vaccine Gardasil in view of information (details supplied); if a booster dose will be required; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23837/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The information that the Deputy seeks is not readily available. Therefore, I have asked the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) to investigate the matter and reply directly to the Deputy.

Vaccination Programme

140. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the reason the HSE failed to provide parents with the HPV vaccine Gardasil manufacturer's package leaflet in the HSE parent information packs which promote the vaccine, particularly in view of the disclaimer contained on the HSE's website; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23838/18]

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

Medicinal Products Availability

141. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will engage with an organisation (details supplied) and the pharmaceutical industry to ensure new medicines are made available to persons with MS which is the case in other European countries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23850/18]

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

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

As outlined in the IPHA agreement, and in line with the 2013 Act, the HSE will decide, within 180 days of receiving the application (or a longer period if further information is sought from the company), to either add the medicine to the reimbursement list or agree to reimburse it as a hospital medicine, or refuse to reimburse the medicine.

HSE decisions on which medicines are reimbursed by the taxpayer are made on objective, scientific and economic grounds, on the advice of the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE).

The NCPE conducts health technology assessments (HTAs) for the HSE, and makes recommendations on reimbursement to assist HSE decisions. The NCPE uses a decision framework to systematically assess whether a drug is cost-effective as a health intervention.

The HSE strives to reach a decision in as timely a manner as possible. However, because of the significant monies involved, it must ensure that the best price is achieved, as these commitments are often multi-million euro investments on an on-going basis. This can lead to a protracted deliberation process.

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

My Office has been in contact with MS Ireland regarding their request and have scheduled a meeting for early June.

Hospital Deaths

142. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23851/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have not been made aware of this case. Should the Deputy wish to provide more specific details in its regard, I will request a report from the HSE.

Hospital Appointments Administration

143. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if a hospital appointment will be scheduled for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23855/18]

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 sched-

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

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

Home Help Service Provision

144. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will have home help hours approved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23856/18]

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.

Neuro-Rehabilitation Policy

145. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health if the implementation plan for the national neurorehabilitation strategy will be submitted to him by the HSE by June 2018 as agreed; the timeframe for implementation; and the investment that will be ringfenced in 2019 to support its implementation [23857/18]

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

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

Defibrillators in Schools Provision

146. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health his plans to place a defibrillator in all schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23863/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The issue of defibrillators in schools is a matter for individual schools in the education sector.

I am supportive of having increased public access to defibrillation, including in schools and will continue to explore the issue with regard to schools and will engage with my colleague the Minister for Education on it in due course.

A National Out of Hospital Cardiac Arrest Steering group was established in 2017.

My Department is committed to improve survival rates of those who suffer an out of hos-

pital cardiac arrest by implementing the recommendations of the out of hospital cardiac arrest strategy which will be completed in the near future.

The purpose of this project is to improve survival rates for those who suffer an out of hospital cardiac arrest through the development and implementation of an out of hospital cardiac arrest strategy up to 2020. This work will support the National Ambulance Service (NAS) and Community First Responder Ireland (CFR Ireland) in their commitment to improve clinical outcomes for Out-of-Hospital Cardiac Arrest (OHCA). It is also considering how to improve Out of Hospital Cardiac Arrest survival by strengthening the 'Chain of Survival' across Ireland. National and international evidence and experience will be assessed to see if it can be applied in Ireland. It is anticipated that the report of the OHCA Steering group will provide advice to the HSE and the Department on the most effective ways of improving survival, including the use of defibrillators in community settings and schools and on increasing CPR training. Once the findings of the Steering group have been published, the relevant recommendations will be carefully considered by all parties.

Cardiac First Responders (CFR) Ireland, launched in 2015, is the national umbrella organisation for Community First Responders Groups. CFR Ireland works with the National Ambulance Service, Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council and the Centre for Emergency Medical Science UCD. Both the NAS and CFR Ireland currently support over 145 Community First Responder schemes throughout Ireland, who train community members to provide emergency care support.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Staff

147. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Health the number of CAMHS mental health nurses on HSE recruitment panels by county; and the number of mental health nurse CAMHS vacancies nationally by county. [23864/18]

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

Services for People with Disabilities

148. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE followed its own policy and procedure for PPPGs in drawing up the assessment of need standard operating procedure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23865/18]

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.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

149. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health his plans to introduce a device (details supplied) under the long-term illness scheme cover for type 1 diabetes; if his attention has been drawn to the device and that it has been introduced in the UK; if research has been carried out on the amount it could save the Exchequer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23866/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

National Stroke Programme Implementation

150. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 358 of 27 March 2018, the funding required to support the appointment of a national stroke audit manager; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23867/18]

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.

Stroke Care

151. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the availability of round the clock CT angiography for stroke patients in South Tipperary General Hospital; the impact of deficiencies in the service on the treatment of stroke patients including assessment for thrombectomy and thrombolysis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23868/18]

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

Stroke Care

152. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the infrastructural and equipment deficits across the stroke programme; the details of capital requests for same made in 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018; the status of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23869/18]

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.

Paediatric Services

153. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health the action taken since the passing of a motion (details supplied) in Dáil Éireann; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23871/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Paediatric Home Care Packages (PHCPs)

are in place to support the discharge of seriously ill children from acute hospital into the care of their families. They are designed to maximise a child's quality of life and developmental opportunities while also helping to keep children out of hospital as much as possible.

The *in loco parentis* rule reflects the fact that PHCPs are intended to serve as a clinical support and is in place to ensure that a second person will be present in the event of an acute emergency such as respiratory arrest, decannulation of a tracheostomy or status epilepticus.

I would like to reassure the Deputy that I am fully aware of the concerns raised about the operation of the *in loco parentis* provision and that I recognise that respite can be an issue for parents of children with complex medical needs. I have asked my officials to engage closely with the HSE on this issue, and I am informed that it is currently being examined as part of the Quality Assurance Process for PHCPs. This process will inform how PHCPs should be delivered, including the operation of the *in loco parentis* provision.

Many parents have already contributed to the Quality Assurance Process, and further engagement will take place in the coming weeks and months. Furthermore, the HSE intends to establish a Parental Reference Group that will help shape how care is delivered to children with complex medical needs.

Dental Services Waiting Lists

154. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** 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. [23873/18]

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

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

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

Disability Support Services Expenditure

155. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost to provide annual rheumatology assessment for children with Down Syndrome; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23884/18]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

156. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23886/18]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities

157. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment with the ASD services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23887/18]

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.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

158. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the reason for excluding persons over 21 years of age with type 1 diabetes from accessing the new FreeStyle Libre glucose monitor; his views on whether it should have been made available to all persons with diabetes based on clinical need at the discretion of their diabetes consultant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23888/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Services for People with Disabilities

159. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if the case of a person (details supplied) will be reviewed; the timeframe for an assessment of need to be scheduled; and if an appointment will be expedited. [23890/18]

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.

Paediatric Services

160. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to reduce the 14 month waiting list for children in CHO9 to access the community ophthalmic physician; his plans to allow those waiting that may be suitable to be treated at a lower level of complexity to see an optometrist; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23897/18]

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.

Schools Health and Safety

161. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the reason the sixth class vision screening has been abolished; his plans to restore the screening programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23898/18]

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 Waiting Lists Action Plans

162. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to reduce the waiting lists for cataract surgery for public patients; if a cost-benefit analysis of the spending by the NTPF on the procurement of cataract services from the private system has been carried out; if so, the results of the analysis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23899/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Programme for Government commits to reducing waiting times for procedures in hospitals and to increase funding to the National Treatment Purchase Fund to deliver on this commitment. In the Budget and Estimates 2018, funding for the NTPF to treat public patients was increased to €50 million.

The Inpatient/Day Case Action Plan is a joint initiative between the HSE, the NTPF and my Department and sets the projected activity and impact that will be delivered in 2018 from within

the allocated funding. As outlined in the Action Plan, a projected 1.16 million inpatient and day case procedures will take place in 2018, with NTPF activity accounting for 20,000 procedures and HSE activity 1.14 million procedures.

Cataract surgery is among the most common surgical procedures carried out in the Ophthalmology specialty. Through the work of the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) and the HSE, the overall number of patients waiting for cataract surgery has fallen by 22% since July 2017, while the number of patients waiting more than 12 months has declined by 71% in the same period.

For 2018, under the Inpatient/Day Case Action Plan, all clinically suitable patients waiting for more than 9 months for a Cataract procedure will be offered treatment this year, with 5,000 NTPF funded procedures planned in both public and private hospitals.

Last year funding was allocated to provide additional capacity at the Royal Victoria Eye and Ear Hospital as a result and a cataract theatre is now operational three days per week. This year, in line with the Action Plan, the HSE is planning to open a dedicated Cataract theatre in Nenagh Hospital in July.

The NTPF procures capacity for each of the procedures identified in the Action Plan in both private hospitals or public hospitals. In 2018, the NTPF projects that the 4,000 of the 20,000 treatments will be delivered in public hospitals.

No formal cost-benefit analysis was carried out in relation to activity funded through the NTPF, nor indeed in respect of activity funded through the HSE. However, the Action Plan strikes the appropriate balance between maximising the number of patients treated in both public and private capacity, as appropriate, and ensuring the best return for the taxpayer.

Health Services Staff Recruitment

163. Deputy Seán Barrett asked the Minister for Health his plans to address the shortage of care workers to provide services on behalf of the HSE for the elderly in the community (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23931/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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 deploy-

ment 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.

As part of the Deputy's question relating to the waiting list for home support in Dun Laoghaire is a service matter, I have arranged for that aspect of the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Medicinal Products Availability

164. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health if his Department or the HSE has engaged with a company (details supplied) with regard to making Translarna available here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23976/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Service Executive has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines under the community drug schemes, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. The 2013 Act does not give the Minister for Health any powers in this regard.

The Act specifies the criteria to be applied in the making of reimbursement decisions which include the clinical and cost effectiveness of the product, the opportunity cost and the impact on resources that are available to the HSE.

In July 2017, the HSE informed the Department that, following an intensive process, the HSE decided not to reimburse Ataluren (Translarna) for the treatment of Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy. The HSE in deciding not to reimburse Translarna did not consider the evidence for its clinical benefit to be sufficiently strong, in the context of the proposed cost and budget impact.

The HSE informed the applicant company of this decision, in keeping with the requirements of the 2013 Act. The applicant has appealed the HSE's decision to the High Court, which is part of the statutory process under Section 27 of the 2013 Act.

A meeting took place on the 11 December 2017 with 2 representatives from Muscular Dystrophy Ireland, Dr O'Rourke and HSE and Departmental officials.

Following on from this meeting, the HSE advised the applicant that it is willing to complete a timely review of any new application. It would be open to the company to make revised proposals in relation to pricing or access in this context.

The HSE has notified the company that is ready and willing to review any new application irrespective of the on-going court proceedings.

Hospitals Expenditure

165. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health his plans for capital expenditure in 2018 at a facility (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23977/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of health care infrastructure projects, the Executive has been requested to reply directly to you with the information requested in relation to Cavan General Hospital.

National Stroke Programme Implementation

166. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of times officials from the national stroke programme have met with the national steering group or the working group for the implementation plan for the national strategy and policy for neurorehabilitation services; the informal discussions that have taken place regarding the area in which stroke fits into the neurorehabilitation strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23983/18]

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

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

Mental Health Services

167. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health the status of the opening of the ten bed unit in the Central Mental Hospital. [23986/18]

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

Mental Health Services Provision

168. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Health the next steps in the development of a mental health unit at Naas General Hospital following its confirmation as part of the National Development Plan 2018-2027; the progress that has been made on this to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23987/18]

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.

Forestry Sector

169. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if an offer of compensation can be considered to remove a condition to replant forestry in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23833/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An application has been received from the person named to fell 0.84ha, which is currently being processed. While it is not possible to pay compensation, it is open to the applicant to plant an alternative area in lieu of the area felled. The proposed alternative planting site must be submitted for approval prior to the issuing of the felling licence.

GLAS Appeals

170. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a decision will be made on a GLAS appeal by a person (details supplied). [23847/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The above named was approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of October 1st 2015.

During a 2017 Land Parcel Imagery Review conducted by the Department, a number of ineligible features were identified on the applicant's 2017 Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) application. This issue is currently being processed to finalise the BPS issues which will then allow the GLAS appeal to be processed further.

Departmental Consultations

171. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a submission has been received from an association (details supplied) in response to the consultation to review the options for more restricted access for large fishing vessels fishing by means of trawls inside the six nautical mile zone; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23875/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The public consultation process on trawling activity within the 6 nautical mile zone began on Monday 30th April 2018 and will run to Monday 11th June 2018. The consultation paper and accompanying reports by the Marine Institute and Bord Iascaigh Mhara are available on the Department's website, along with information on how to participate in the consultation process.

To date, we have not received a submission from the association listed but we welcome all submissions until the closing date.

Animal Carcase Disposal

172. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the action he has taken regarding breaches of the Disposal of Carcasses (Prohibition) Regulations 2015 (details supplied); the number of cases his Department has knowledge of; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23914/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): There have been 3 persons prosecuted for breaches of the Disposal of Carcasses (Prohibition) Regulations

2015 (SI 160/2015) to date. A further 4 cases are currently before the Courts and 1 case is in preparation with a view to initiating a prosecution if such a course is supported by the evidence.

Forestry Premium Payments

173. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a matter (details supplied) will be investigated; if the outstanding payment will issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23930/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The area of forestry in question was approved in 1990 under the Western Tree Planting Grant Scheme. The Department have investigated the issue in question and can confirm that the total approved grant for this contract was paid in two parts, with the first payment made in November 1990 and the second – and final – instalment was made in 1998. Under the Western Package Tree Planting Grant Scheme, no annual premium payments were due. Therefore, all payments have been made under this contract and it is considered closed.

Horse Racing Ireland Staff

174. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if neither he nor another person authorised formally or informally by him acting on his behalf communicated with the new chairperson of Horse Racing Ireland at any time prior to him making the appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23932/18]

175. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the new chairperson of Horse Racing Ireland applied to be considered for the position of chairman through the agencies, stateboards.ie or publicjobs.ie; if the person complied with all the requirements set down in the advertisement for the position and was interviewed in a face-to-face meeting at the offices of the Public Appointments Service, Middle Abbey Street, Dublin 1, prior to him making the appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23933/18]

176. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of males and females, respectively, that expressed an interest in being considered for the position of chairperson of Horse Racing Ireland that applied through the agencies, stateboards.ie and publicjobs.ie; the number of males and females, respectively that were interviewed in a face-to-face meeting at the offices of stateboards.ie or the Public Appointments Service prior to him making the appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23934/18]

177. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of males or females, respectively that expressed an interest in the position of chairperson of Horse Racing Ireland to his Department and that did not apply through the agencies, stateboards.ie and or publicjobs.ie; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23935/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 174 to 177, inclusive, together.

I have been informed by PAS that they received nine applications and that the gender breakdown was seven males and two females. The Assessment Panel examined and assessed the material submitted in the application letters and CVs of all the candidates and agreed that three candidates should be further considered and invited to meet with a subgroup of the panel.

One of the three shortlisted candidates was out of the country and was interviewed via

conference call by the members of the subgroup. The same members of the subgroup also interviewed the other two candidates but as these were available to travel to the PAS offices, the meetings were face to face. The same PAS representative was present for each of the three interviews. Of the three candidates, two were considered to meet the published criteria for the position and these two names were put forward to the Minister for consideration for appointment.

In relation to the person appointed, prior to the competition my Department confirmed to him that the appointment would be made through the PAS application process, and one of my officials informed him of the outcome at the end of the process.

I am personally committed to achieving the Government target of 40% gender balance on the Boards of State Bodies. I wrote to the Chief Executives of some agri-business companies asking them to support women within their companies who express an interest in being appointed to the Boards of State Bodies and to encourage those who may not as yet have considered putting themselves forward to do so.

In relation to six of the State Bodies under the aegis of my Department, some of the board appointments are made by me on the basis of nominations from third-party organisations for specified vacancies as set out in legislation. These State Bodies are the Aquaculture Licensing Appeals Board, Bord Bia, Horse Racing Ireland, National Milk Agency, Teagasc and the Veterinary Council of Ireland. I actively encourage the relevant nominating organisations to be pro-active in encouraging women within their membership to consider putting themselves forward for nomination for appointment to the Board of the State Body to which the organisation makes a nomination.

I will continue to take every opportunity to achieve gender balance on the Boards of State Bodies under the aegis of my Department.

Common Fisheries Policy

178. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which the Common Fisheries Policy conditions in relation to conservation are being observed to the letter and in spirit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23945/18]

179. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the EU fisheries conservation policy is achieving targets in respect of all species; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23947/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 178 and 179 together.

The Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) provides the framework for the long term conservation and sustainability of fish stocks around our shores and is designed to ensure the long term sustainability of fishing throughout EU waters.

Key features of the CFP include setting Total Allowable Catches (TACs) and quotas to deliver maximum sustainable yield (MSY) for all target stocks by 2020 as well as a discards ban (Landing Obligation) that will be fully phased in by 2019. These objectives should ultimately lead to healthier fish stocks, higher quotas for both Irish and EU fishermen and more sustainable fishing patterns.

In the European Union as a whole, 53 stocks will be fished at MSY in 2018 which is an improvement from 44 in 2017. As recently as 2009 the number of stocks at MSY was only 5. The

rebuilding of many of our stocks is demonstrated by a 34% increase in our whitefish quotas off the north-west coast and a 64% increase in the Irish Sea compared to 5 years ago - both areas where stocks were depleted.

Scientific information on the state of the fisheries exploited by the Irish fleet is compiled by the Marine Institute and is published in the Stock Book each year. The most recent Stock Book, 2017, contains 74 stocks managed under the CFP in which Ireland has a quota share. Of those 74 stocks, 29 were assessed as being sustainably fished in 2017. This number has grown every year since 2013. This in turn leads to the number of stocks being overfished declining from 22 in 2014 to 17 in 2017. The biomass of stocks, the quantity of mature fish in the sea, has also increased. In 2017 there were 27 stocks in a positive state above biomass trigger points. This is an increase over the preceding year of 22.

Ireland intends to continue to work with all stakeholders, Member States and the Commission to build upon this substantial and tangible progress to achieve the ambitious conservation targets set out in the CFP while supporting the communities that depend on a vibrant fishing industry.

Food Industry Exports

180. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he continues to encourage new markets for food and food products; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23948/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The pursuit and development of new markets for Irish agri-food exports is of course an ongoing and central component of the strategic development of the agri-food sector, as evidenced by its placement right at the centre of Food Wise 2025, the industry's strategy for development over the coming decade. Indeed, this is all the more relevant after the UK's decision to leave the EU, which presents significant new challenges for the agri-food sector in particular.

Food Wise 2025 outlines the huge potential for growth in agri-food exports to new and emerging markets, particularly in Asia, Africa and the Gulf region.

In keeping with the priorities outlined in Food Wise 2025, I led a very successful Trade Mission in February 2017 to the Gulf Region. This covered the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. This was followed by an extensive Trade Mission to the US and Mexico in June. Both of these latter markets offer many elements that are very attractive to Irish exporters. The US is the largest food and beverage market in the world and has a population of 324 million people. Around 35 million Americans also claim Irish ancestry. Mexico has a population of 127 million, making it the eleventh-largest country in the world in population terms and the fifteenth-largest economy in the world, with projections that it will move into the top five by 2050.

Later in 2017, during a Trade Mission to Japan and South Korea in November, I was accompanied by 40 representatives of the Irish food sector, as well as by experts from my Department, the CEO of Bord Bia and senior representatives from Enterprise Ireland and Teagasc.

This was a very opportune time to bring a delegation of Ireland's food leaders to this part of the world, given that the EU has concluded a Free Trade Agreement with South Korea as well as concluding an Economic Partnership Agreement with Japan in December 2017. Japan and South Korea are markets of high potential for beef, pigmeat and sheepmeat exports, and so it is important that we raise the profile of Irish agri-food enterprises that already have access to these

markets, and make progress in negotiating access for others.

Following a further Trade Mission to the US and Canada in February, earlier this month I led a Trade Mission to China and Hong Kong. This was an extremely successful mission in the development of our ever-growing partnership with China. For example, being present at one of the World's largest food trade exhibitions in Shanghai allowed me to reinforce the positive messages about the quality and sustainability of Irish agri-food exports to Asian buyers, and I was also fortunate to secure meetings with three senior Chinese Ministers and three Vice-Ministers over the course of the week. There is a clear ambition on both sides to further build co-operation between Ireland and China on many levels, including trade, and I will continue to do all I can to maximise this potential.

These and the other missions that my Department are planning for the latter half of 2018 will serve to enhance and improve our existing levels of market access in these destinations. It will also promote Ireland's reputation as a producer of high quality, safe and sustainably produced meat and dairy products.

The destinations are also in keeping with the market prioritisation exercise that was undertaken by Bord Bia at my request. This exercise identified opportunities in new and more mature markets, and will provide valuable market intelligence both for industry operators and policy makers as we continue to navigate the very uncertain environment created by Brexit.

My Department will continue to seek out and identify new markets, and I am ready to respond as appropriate to other opportunities that may arise.

Brexit Issues

181. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the degree to which Irish beef, lamb, poultry and pigmeat are well placed to compete in EU and non-EU markets having particular regard to the impact of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23949/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Brexit has the potential to have a significant impact across all areas of the Irish agri food sector, including the beef, lamb, poultry and pigmeat sectors. These sectors are of critical importance to the Irish economy. Their regional spread means they underpin the socio-economic development of rural Ireland. Farming is an essential part of the social, cultural and economic fabric of the country and it is also part of a wider EU dispensation that values a Common Agriculture Policy built on family farming, food security, high standards of food safety and environmental sustainability. These are values that we hold dear, and so it is critically important when we consider the impact of Brexit that the positive contribution of agriculture to the rural and national economy, and to society in Ireland - and, indeed, elsewhere in the European Union - is to the forefront in our deliberations.

Market diversification is a key component of the Government response to the challenges posed by Brexit, as we seek to reduce our exposure to the UK market and develop alternative markets for our exports. The pursuit and development of new markets for Irish agri-food exports is of course an ongoing and central component of the strategic development of the agri-food sector, as evidenced by its placement right at the centre of Food Wise 2025, the industry's strategy for development over the coming decade.

Food Wise 2025 outlines the huge potential for growth in agri-food exports to new and emerging markets, including in Asia, Africa and the Gulf region. This is something that I have

been following up in a very practical way by leading Trade Missions to these destinations. For example, I have just returned from a Trade Mission to China and Hong Kong where I continued to develop the trade and political relationships that have been given a very significant boost recently through the opening of the Chinese market to beef exports from Ireland. I had very good and productive meetings with a number of Ministers, including my counterpart, the Chinese Minister for Agriculture, as well as supporting the Irish presence at SIAL Shanghai, which is now the largest food fair in the world.

This follows on from successful trade missions to Canada and the USA last February, Japan and Korea in November 2017, the USA and Mexico in June 2017, and Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in February/March 2017. I will also, as part of the ongoing effort to reduce our exposure to the UK market, lead further trade missions in 2018 in order to promote Irish food and drink in key markets.

It is also worth pointing out that the identification of Trade Mission destinations is in keeping with the recent market prioritisation exercise that was completed by Bord Bia, at my request. This exercise identified opportunities in new and more mature markets, and will provide valuable market intelligence both for industry operators and policy makers as we seek to deal with the impacts of Brexit.

My Department will continue to seek out and help to develop new markets, and I am ready to respond as appropriate to other opportunities that may arise.

Food Safety Standards Regulation

182. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the degree to which traceability, quality, husbandry and production requirements continue to be met in respect of all food and food products imported into the European Union; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23950/18]

183. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of breaches of EU standards in respect of the agrifood sector that have been identified over the past 12 months and deemed to be in breach of EU standards and traceability guidelines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23951/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 182 and 183 together.

Food products placed on the marketplace are covered by a range of legislation designed to ensure that products supplied to consumers are of the highest safety standards. My Department plays a part in the enforcement of this legislation along with other Government Departments and State Agencies such as the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI), the Health Service Executive, and Local Authority Veterinary Inspectorate, Marine Institute and the Sea Fisheries Protection Agency. The FSAI is the body responsible for enforcement of regulations governing traceability, labelling and provision of food information to customers.

Primary responsibility under EU law for the safety and traceability of food placed on the market lies with food business operators. The role of National Competent Agencies is to verify compliance with this requirement. This is done via a combination of inspecting establishments and auditing the food safety management systems which operators have in place. These controls are applied at different stages in the food supply chain. Regulation (EC) No. 178 of 2002 sets out the general principles and requirements of EU food law and stipulates that food business operators must, at all stages of production, processing and distribution within their

business, ensure food law requirements are satisfied. In regard to traceability, the regulations require that food business operators have what is referred to as the ‘one step forward, one step backward’ traceability system. There are additional requirements for certain fishery and aquaculture products under the Control Regulation (Regulation 1224/2009 and Implementing Regulation 404/2011) from first sale to subsequent stages of production, processing and distribution up to retail.

My Department has a permanent veterinary presence at all its approved slaughter plants. Controls at plants only engaged in secondary processing are carried out at a frequency based on an annual risk assessment. An annual audit of imported products is carried out in each Department-approved plant, including checks on physical identity, labelling and documentary checks.

Extra veterinary checks are carried out on selected consignments of foods imported into DAFM-approved establishments from other EU Member States or from Third Countries outside the EU. These checks include physical checks of product condition, checks of accompanying documentation and checks of labelling and health markings.

The import of products of animal origin from third countries is governed by a comprehensive and robust legislative framework laid down at EU level, controlled by Member States in the first instance, and audited by the European Commission’s Directorate General for Health and Food Safety, to ensure compliance with all of the relevant food safety standards. The legislation imposes health and supervisory requirements designed to ensure that imported products meet standards equivalent to those required for production and trade between Member States. Border Inspection Posts are operated by my Department. Import control procedures on products of animal and fish origin are highly prescriptive and strictly audited by the Directorate to ensure compliance. Inspection finding reports are published on the Directorate General for Health and Food Safety’s website.

I am satisfied that the controls and checks in place and enforced by my Department which included 183 annual meat labelling audits in 2017, ensure that Irish consumers are protected and correctly informed when they purchase and consume food products.

The Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) has service contracts in place with the official agencies performing official controls, to verify compliance with the extensive requirements of food labelling legislation, in these establishments. The FSAI reports in detail on the number of inspections and checks carried out, and non-compliance findings.

Fish Producer Organisations

184. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which fish processing facilities here remain adequate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23952/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): There are at present 212 land-based approved seafood processors in Ireland and these are largely dispersed around our main fishing ports. The scale of these premises varies greatly from micro enterprises, to medium sized enterprises, to large enterprises.

A range of supports are available to seafood processors through my Department’s €240 million European Maritime and Fisheries Fund Operational Programme 2014-20. Depending on the scale of the enterprise, it may apply for supports for capital investment to its local Fisheries Local Action Group or to Bord Iascaigh Mhara. Additional supports are available from BIM for new product development, business planning, market research and route to market structures.

Farms Data

185. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent of deer farming, domestic and-or export markets for venison; the extent to which the industry can grow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23953/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Deer farming in Ireland is an alternative enterprise which is dependent on the dynamics of supply and demand which affect all agricultural production systems. In 1996 there were approximately 500 deer farms with 20,000 deer in Ireland, but numbers have declined sharply since that time.

Today there are only a small number of farmers in Ireland actively supplying deer for meat production, which cater primarily to specialised niche markets. The sector is reliant upon producers and companies ensuring that a market exists for their product, an objective which Bord Bia assists in by identifying and developing potential market outlets.

There was some recent growth in game (venison) market during 2016 for example with around 764 deer slaughtered for this market, but, this declined to 271 deer for 2017, with no deer slaughtered so far in 2018. Growth in the past was achieved as a result of improved distribution for game meats, especially in supermarkets. Game and exotic meats historically occupy a premium, niche segment of the meat market. Whilst there are opportunities to compete with the larger premium segment of the red meat/poultry categories, it is important to note that demand is seasonal, with the greatest concentration of retail shelf space dedicated to game in the Winter/Christmas period.

My Department has approved one factory for the slaughter of deer in Ireland, and two game handling plants. There may also be outlets for processing of venison in Local Authority approved plants, but this would be a matter for the Local Authority concerned.

In addition my Department will continue to seek out and identify viable markets for all types of meat products, including venison, and I am ready to respond as appropriate to market opportunities that could arise in the future.

Poultry Industry

186. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he continues to monitor the poultry sector, with particular reference to threats to the industry; the degree to which the potential for growth remains; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23954/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Poultry Sector plays an important role within the Irish agri-food sector, supporting around 6,000 jobs, most of these in rural areas.

The value of Irish poultry exports in 2017 increased by 3% to an estimated €278 million (CSO trade data), with the United Kingdom accounting for some 80% of this figure in value terms. Other EU markets now account for almost 10% of Irish exports, with France leading the way. Growth has also been seen in trade with the Scandinavian nations and Spain. Exports to third country markets now amounts to 10% of export totals, with South Africa showing the biggest growth for Irish exporters.

Irish production hit record levels in 2017, with 95.5 million birds slaughtered in export-approved plants, an increase of 3.9% compared to 2016, with most of the increase evident in broiler and duck production. Overall, Irish poultry production is forecast to remain broadly stable during 2018.

While the outlook for the poultry sector is positive, the sector continues to face challenges particularly the ongoing uncertainty around Brexit. In this context, the pursuit and development of new markets is an ongoing and central component of the strategic development of the agri-food sector, as evidenced by the market development theme of Food Wise 2025.

Avian influenza remains a threat. Following recent outbreaks in Europe, my Department continues to monitor the situation closely and engage with flock owners, with a view to remaining vigilant and implementing the necessary biosecurity measures required to safeguard Irish flocks.

The Rural Development programme 2014 – 2020 (RDP) is also providing key supports for the enhancement and the competitiveness of the poultry sector. The main areas for support in the RDP for the poultry sector include support for on-farm capital investment under the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme II (TAMS II) scheme and knowledge transfer and innovation measures, aimed at underpinning farm viability, sustainability and growth through the adoption of best practice and innovative solutions.

Livestock Issues

187. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the strength of the national beef, dairy and pig herds and the sheep flock; the extent to which numbers have fluctuated over the past ten years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23955/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The CSO's June Livestock Survey includes the information below for the years 2007-2017:

000 head	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Total cattle	6,891	6,902	6,891	6,607	6,493
- of which: Dairy cows	1,090	1,095	1,097	1,071	1,117
-of which: Other cows	1,207	1,220	1,204	1,158	1,123
Total sheep	5,522	5,061	4,778	4,745	4,830
of which: Ewes	2,854	2,614	2,451	2,450	2,435
Total pigs	1,588	1,462	1,385	1,516	1,549
of which: Female breeding pigs	164	156	147	160	155

table ctd.

000 head	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Total cattle	6,754	6,903	6,926	6,964	7,221	7,364
- of which: Dairy cows	1,141	1,163	1,226	1,296	1,398	1,433
-of which: Other cows	1,149	1,150	1,129	1,076	1,104	1,081
Total sheep	5,170	5,007	5,097	5,139	5,179	5,197
of which: Ewes	2,589	2,568	2,514	2,488	2,505	2,515
Total pigs	1,571	1,553	1,555	1,537	1,594	1,557

000 head	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
of which: Female breeding pigs	145	147	150	148	149	143

More detailed data from the CSO's June and December Livestock Surveys each year is available at the following link: <https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/agricultureandfishing/>.

Equine Industry

188. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he expects the sporting horse non-thoroughbred industry to continue to prosper here into the future, notwithstanding ongoing geopolitical changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23956/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I assume when the Deputy mentions geopolitical changes he is talking about 'Brexit'. Brexit poses enormous challenges for the equine sector. I and my Department officials have been engaging extensively with the sector in this regard, through the Department's Stakeholder Consultative Committee, the All-Island Civic Dialogue process and through ongoing bilateral contacts. These meetings have helped the Department to develop a comprehensive understanding of the significant potential implications of Brexit for the sector and these will be taken into consideration in the Department's ongoing analysis of the potential negative effects.

School Milk Scheme

189. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 240 of 10 May 2018, if further details of the new model of implementation for the school milk scheme for the 2018-2019 period will be provided; the new features contained in the new model; the key differences in the way in which the new model will differ from current and previous practices; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23980/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In 2016, the EU adopted Regulations providing for a new Single School Scheme merging the existing School Milk Scheme with the existing School Fruit and Vegetables Scheme under a new legal and financial framework from the 2017/18 school year, commencing on 1 August 2017. Under this new framework, each participating Member State was required to submit to the EU Commission a six year Statement of Strategy setting out its particular objectives for the scheme for this duration. Ireland submitted its six year Statement of Strategy in July 2017. The 2018/19 school year is the second year of this strategy.

With regard to the School Milk Scheme, one of Ireland's main objectives in the Strategy is to halt the decline in the participation rate by Irish schoolchildren in the school milk scheme, which has been declining steadily over the last number of years, and thereby contribute to the formulation of healthy eating habits and choices at an early age.

Under the new framework, which takes effect from the 2017/2018 school year, the National Dairy Council (NDC) was appointed to manage and run the School Milk Scheme on the ground at school level in Ireland.

The NDC ran a National School Milk Week in April 2018 together with a targeted publicity

and early recruitment campaign for schools to sign up to the Scheme for the 2018/19 school year.

Accompanying educational measures are an essential element of the new School Scheme. Ireland has introduced new accompanying educational measures including the NDC's Moo Crew school based programme, which provides a positive platform to educate children about dairy and the importance of dairy as part of a balanced diet. This programme includes dairy based lesson plans, DVD's and other tailored activities for all participating school children. Additionally, fun packs for Montessori schools and specific nutrition booklets for junior and senior pupils in primary and secondary schools are distributed.

The model of delivery in the 2018/2019 School Year of the School Milk Scheme in Ireland will stay largely the same as the 2017/18 school year which was the first year of the new framework, but will include more frequent deliveries, where feasible, and a minimum of 2 weeks free milk for participating schoolchildren.

My Department will continue to work with the National Dairy Council in the 2018/19 school year to pilot additional activities under the school milk scheme.

Farm Household Incomes

190. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if additional supports will be introduced to improve suckler farm incomes in view of the ongoing pressures on the particular sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23985/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Examination of appropriate measures to support all agri food sectors, including the suckler sector, is underway in my Department in preparation for the next iteration of the CAP. The measures adopted will be informed by stakeholder consultation on the needs of the sector to develop in an economically and environmentally sustainable way, as well as the available budget and structure of the new CAP when it is finalised.

Currently, the Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) is the main support specifically targeted for the suckler sector, which provides Irish beef farmers with some 300 million euro in funding over the current Rural Development Programme (RDP) period. This scheme is an agri-environmental measure to improve the environmental sustainability of the national suckler herd by increasing genetic merit within the herd.

My Department has rolled out a range of schemes as part of the 4 billion euro Rural Development Programme (RDP), 2014 - 2020. In addition to the BDGP, other supports which are available for suckler farmers under Pillar II of the CAP include GLAS, ANCs and Knowledge Transfer Groups. Suckler farmers also benefit from the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and Greening payments under CAP Pillar I.

I am strongly of the view that the current range of supports available to suckler farmers, together with ensuring market access to as many markets as possible, both for live animals and beef exports, are appropriate supports for the continued development of the sector. National Farm Survey data suggests that suckler farmers receive support equivalent to approximately €500 per suckler cow on average.

I will continue to argue for as strong a CAP budget as possible, post 2020. In particular, I am committed to ensuring that suckler farmers continue to receive strong support in the next CAP. My view is that such payments should support and encourage suckler farmers to make

the best decisions possible to improve the profitability, and the economic and environmental efficiency, of their farming system.

Departmental Expenditure

191. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a review of underspend in different subheads in his Department's estimates has been completed; if such underspend will be reallocated to support suckler farm incomes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23988/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department's expenditure is monitored and managed carefully on an ongoing basis throughout the year and I fully expect all the funding allocated for 2018 will be expended closely in line with the distribution across subheads and schemes as set out in the Revised Estimates for Public Services 2018. Accordingly I don't anticipate that funding will be available in 2018 for reallocation to further support suckler farm incomes.

The Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020 is reviewed on an on-going basis to ensure that EU objectives are met and that all EU funding is fully drawn down. Expenditure on RDP schemes must be funded through the national exchequer in the first instance so clearly my Department's Vote management and RDP monitoring are closely connected.

The latest RDP projected spend over the programme period confirms that the entire budget of some €4 billion is fully committed and expected to be spent and therefore no new schemes under the RDP can be considered at this time.

Currently, the Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) is the main support specifically targeted for the suckler sector, which provides Irish beef farmers with some €300 million in funding over the current Rural Development Programme (RDP) period. This scheme is an agri-environmental measure to improve the environmental sustainability of the national suckler herd by increasing genetic merit within the herd.

My Department has rolled out a range of relevant schemes as part of the RDP: In addition to the BDGP, other supports which are available for suckler farmers under the RDP (Pillar II of the CAP) include GLAS, ANCs and Knowledge Transfer Groups. Suckler farmers also benefit from the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and Greening payments under CAP Pillar I.

I am strongly of the view that the current range of supports available to suckler farmers, together with ensuring market access to as many markets as possible, both for live animals and beef exports, are appropriate supports for the continued development of the sector. National Farm Survey data suggests that suckler farmers receive support equivalent to approximately €500 per suckler cow on average.

I will continue to argue for as strong a CAP budget as possible, post 2020. In particular, I am committed to ensuring that suckler farmers continue to receive strong support in the next CAP. My view is that such payments should support and encourage suckler farmers to make the best decisions possible to improve the profitability, and the economic and environmental efficiency, of their farming system.

Departmental Consultations

192. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and

Environment if correspondence from a person (details supplied) in relation to the Designated Salmonid Waters Bye-Law 2018, will be examined. [23909/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): The correspondence referred to is a submission to the public consultation process which I invited regarding the proposed draft Designated Salmonid Waters Bye-law 2018. All submissions to the consultation process, received by the closing date of 25 May 2018, will be considered.

Inland Fisheries Stocks

193. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which EU salmon fishery conservation policies are achieving success as anticipated; if particular initiatives are required to reaffirm objectives previously set; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23946/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) is the State Agency statutorily responsible for the management and conservation of Ireland's Inland fisheries resources including wild Atlantic salmon. The management of inland fisheries generally is a matter of national rather than EU competence having regard to certain EU legislation, most notably the Habitats Directive under which salmon habitats are protected. IFI manages indigenous salmon stocks on an individual river basis as each of Ireland's 147 salmon rivers (including river sections and estuaries) has its own genetically unique stock of salmon.

IFI is supported in its management role by the independent Standing Scientific Committee (SSC), comprising scientists from a range of organisations. Scientific and management assessments of each of the distinct stocks are carried out every year with IFI engaged in extensive stock monitoring which feeds into the SSC's annual reviews. The SSC uses catch returns to individual rivers (rod catch, catch and release and any commercial catch) over the previous five years to estimate the total salmon returns in each of the previous five years. The use of a five year average ensures that a good or bad year does not have a disproportionate impact on the stock assessment in any single year.

The decline in wild Atlantic Salmon is a shared international issue manifesting in rivers in all countries around the North Atlantic with scientific analysis from the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) estimating that marine survival of migrating salmon has been at or below 5% in the North Atlantic for more than a decade.

Marine survival is considered to have a most significant influence on return, from far North Atlantic feeding grounds, of salmon to all rivers on Atlantic coasts. Climate change in the ocean is considered to be a major factor. There is also evidence that heavy sea-lice infestation from salmon farming has resulted in additional mortality in respect of migratory North Atlantic salmon generally. In freshwater, water quality and a range of pressures such as afforestation, drainage, effluent discharge, siltation and agricultural enrichment can all have an impact on juvenile salmon production.

The protection and conservation of salmon internationally is managed through the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation (NASCO) with which Ireland is aligned through the European Union. Concerted international co-operation has ensured that restrictions in Greenland and Faroese waters have been in place for a number of years via NASCO agreement. In June this year, my officials and those of IFI will join delegates from the EU, USA, Canada,

Norway, the Russian Federation, Greenland and the Faroes in seeking to negotiate a continuation of restrictions in these waters.

Specifically in relation to Greenlandic waters, the majority component of the stock complex migrating to these waters originates from the North American Continent. There is no commercial harvest in Faroese waters where the migratory stock complex comprises a majority component of European river stocks including those from Ireland.

The Atlantic salmon is a protected species under the EU Habitats Directive with which Ireland's current salmon management regime complies. In order to align fully with the Directive and the North NASCO principles, Ireland closed mixed stock fisheries at sea since 2007.

Waste Disposal Charges

194. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the specific environmental requirements that are set down in respect of charges that may be applied by waste companies to encourage householders to divert waste from the residual or general waste bin, that is, have higher waste charges for general waste bins than recycling bins; the specific statutory basis for these requirements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23860/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Waste Collection Companies are required to hold a waste collection permit in order to collect waste in line with the Waste Management (Collection Permit) Regulations 2007, as amended. Waste collection permits are issued by the National Waste Collection Permit Office, which is the nominated authority to issue permits on behalf of all local authorities.

Condition 6.6.26 of the permits contains the requirement for collectors to charge fees which encourage customers to segregate their waste and states:

“The permit holder shall operate an incentivised charging system to ensure that the fees charged to collect household kerbside waste, in the reasonable opinion and to the satisfaction of the nominated authority respect the polluter pays principle and incentivise the segregation of recyclables and food waste or as the case may be, bio-waste and discourage such waste from being mixed with residual household waste by the householder in accordance with the waste hierarchy and section 21A of the act.

The permit holder shall ensure that the fees charged to collect residual household waste are not a “flat rate fee” i.e. a fixed, periodic fee which covers the cost of collection over a defined period of time, regardless of the weight or residual waste presented or the number of presentation of residual waste.

Pricing structures may contain a service fee or standing charge, but shall contain a weight based/or per lift fee for the collection of residual waste. Where a service fee is applied as part of an incentivised charging system, the level of the service fee shall not negate the incentive to segregate waste to the satisfaction of the nominated authority. Where a fee is charged for the collection of recyclable, food waste and bio-waste as the case may be, that fee shall not negate the incentive to segregate waste to the satisfaction of the nominated authority and shall be lower than the fees applied for the collection of residual household waste.

Any “flat rate fees” currently in operation shall be phased out as follows:

- i. New customers or renewing customers cannot be offered a flat rate fee for residual house-

hold waste from 30 September 2017;

ii. Customers who have a contract and are on a flat rate fee on 30 September 2017 cannot be offered a flat rate fee for residual household waste when they next review their contract' and

iii. Customers who are on a contract greater than 12 months on 30 September 2017 cannot remain on a flat rate fee for residual household waste collection after 30 September 2018."

Broadband Service Provision

195. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the options available to a person (details supplied) who has been refused broadband access by Eir; the implications of this on his Department's broadband rollout plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23917/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): According to my Department's National Broadband Plan High Speed Broadband Map, available at www.broadband.gov.ie, the premises detailed by the Deputy's has been passed by Eir as part of that company's ongoing commercial deployment of high speed broadband to 300K rural premises. A high speed broadband connection is therefore available and I understand a connection has been offered to the Deputy's constituent by Eir. I further understand that the method proposed by Eir to deliver this high speed broadband connection to the premises was not accepted and as a consequence connection to the premises did not proceed. This has been confirmed following contact between an official from my Department and the Deputy's constituent.

Decisions made by private telecommunication operators relating to the rollout and siting of infrastructure to provide high speed broadband services throughout Ireland are undertaken on a commercial basis by competing service providers operating in a liberalised market. I have no statutory role or function to intervene in the commercial decisions of private operators, and therefore cannot direct operators regarding infrastructure installation or delivery of services.

The Deputy's constituent may be able to secure an alternative broadband connection via a fixed wireless, mobile broadband or satellite service.

North-South Interconnector

196. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when he plans to publish the independent review of the proposed North-South interconnector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23944/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The North South Interconnector, as proposed as an overhead line, now has full planning permission in both Ireland and Northern Ireland. I have listened carefully to the issues raised in relation to this project, particularly those living in close proximity to the proposed project. In February and March 2017, two motions calling for an updated independent study into the north-south interconnector were passed by Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann. I met with the Monaghan Anti-Pylon Committee and North East Pylon Pressure Campaign, together with Oireachtas members from Cavan, Monaghan and Meath in February 2017. I subsequently met with Oireachtas members in May 2017 and most recently again in January of this year. In addition, my officials have held separate meetings with the Monaghan Anti-Pylon Committee

and North East Pylon Pressure Campaign in March and April last year.

All of these engagements – together with the motions - were important in my decision to commission two independent studies into the project. The studies were designed to address the main points of the motions as well as key concerns expressed by those parties opposed to the development of an overhead line.

I have indicated previously that the Consultants undertaking the two studies have finalised their reports, that once considered in my department and submitted to me it is my intention that these will be brought to Government and made publicly available, and that this process would take some time to complete.

Broadcasting Authority of Ireland

197. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to Parliamentary Question No. 263 of 10 May 2018, the preparatory work being undertaken in advance of the publication of the revised text of the audiovisual media services directive; the considerations being given to the issue of co-regulation of audiovisual content on video sharing platform services; the work being carried out with an organisation (details supplied) on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23981/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): My Department has engaged extensively with the European Commission, other Member States and key stakeholders during the negotiation of this legislative proposal. Earlier this year, my Department conducted an initial scoping consultation with key stakeholders regarding the provisions that are expected to be contained in the final text. My Department is considering the input received while also conducting a scoping exercise which includes examining existing legislation and regulatory structures. The result of this process will be used to inform its approach to a public consultation which will be conducted once the text of the revised Directive has been finalised at EU level.

This public consultation will seek to gather the views of all interested parties on how we should approach the implementation of the provisions of the revised Directive, including the required changes to the regulation of on-demand service providers in Ireland, and how we should approach the co-regulation of Audiovisual Content on Video-Sharing Platform Services.

My officials have met and engaged with the On Demand Audiovisual Services Group (ODAS) on several occasions during the past two years, given the particular impact which the provisions of the revised Directive will have on-demand service providers. It should be noted that ODAS has no role in relation to Video-Sharing Platform Services.

Climate Change Policy

198. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the role of his Department in relation to the development of the European climate and energy plan. [23788/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): My Department has the lead role in developing the National Energy and Climate Plan. The creation of a National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP) is one of the key provisions of the proposed Governance of the Energy Union Regulation. The plan will include trajecto-

ries for renewable energy, energy efficiency, and national emissions, as well as the measures required to achieve these trajectories.

In October 2014 EU leaders agreed on a 2030 Framework for climate and energy, which included new EU-wide targets and policy objectives for the period between 2021 and 2030. The three targets from this framework are at least 27% share for renewable energy, at least 27% improvement in energy efficiency, and at least 40% cuts in greenhouse gas emissions (from 1990 levels). The proposed Governance of the Energy Union Regulation will underpin these commitments. The NECP will cover all five dimensions of the Energy Union, the policies and measures proposed to reach these goals and will be based on a common template to allow for comparability. The first draft is due for submission to the Commission by end 2018, with a final version due by end 2019.

It should be noted that the Governance Regulation is the subject of an ongoing trilogue process with the European Parliament which is expected to conclude later this year. Until this point is reached, the targets, policy objectives and timelines are subject to revision.

My Department is working closely with other Departments on the development of the plan through the structures that have been established to co-ordinate Government activity on climate change. There is a high-level steering committee on climate action, which I chair, and a Technical Research and Modelling group which provides expert advice and support. Relevant Departments and agencies are members of these groups.

Preparation of the plan is at an early stage but its development will be facilitated by the work already undertaken to complete the Energy White Paper, the National Mitigation Plan, and the recently published National Development Plan. The NDP in particular represents a step-change in Government commitment to climate change, with €21.8 billion in funding directed to addressing the transition to a low-carbon society over the period to 2030. This week I launched a €500 million Climate Action Fund, which is a key element of Government strategy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, increase renewable energy and enhance energy efficiency as set out in the NDP.

Tourism Project Funding

199. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if there are grants available for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23806/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): My Department's role in relation to tourism lies in the area of national tourism policy. It is not directly involved in the management or development of individual tourism projects. These are operational matters for the Board and Management of Fáilte Ireland. While the Department provides funding to Fáilte Ireland for investment in tourism, it does not have a role in the administration of Fáilte Ireland's tourism capital programmes. However, I am aware that all accommodation projects, including the renovation of private property, are currently ineligible under Fáilte Ireland's capital grants schemes.

Departmental Reviews

200. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if members of an association and a company (details supplied) will be fully engaged with the external party

retained by him to conduct the review of the current arrangements in place to oversee a different company's operations as recommended by the Air Accident Investigation Unit. [23839/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Search and Rescue Oversight Review is being carried out by an independent team of experts whom I appointed last week. Details are available on the Department's website - www.dttas.ie. The focus is on oversight of SAR aviation operations. It is a matter for the review team to determine who they engage with.

As stated in the terms of reference, the review will consider, inter alia, the practices and procedures in place for oversight of SAR aviation operations within the IAA, as the national aviation regulator and the Irish Coast Guard, as the tasking authority for SAR aviation operations, and any other entities deemed relevant, and benchmark these in terms of their effectiveness, continuity, comprehensiveness and independence against models of best practice internationally.

Ministerial Meetings

201. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to immediately honour the commitment he had repeatedly given to meet with representatives of an association (details supplied) that had been seeking a meeting in relation to aviation safety matters for over a year. [23840/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I met with the association referred to by the Deputy on 17th February 2017. A future meeting will be arranged at a time and date that is mutually convenient and appropriate.

Irish Aviation Authority

202. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will make available the terms of reference for the forthcoming section 32 examination and contact details for the entity appointed to conduct this examination as required by law following the completion of the section 32 report by a company (details supplied). [23841/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, Section 32 of the Irish Aviation Act 1993 provides for an examination of the functions of the Irish Aviation Authority in so far as they relate to the application and enforcement of technical and safety standards in relation to aircraft and air navigation. The Act requires such an examination to be carried out every 3 years. The IAA is also subject to similar, periodic examinations by the European Aviation Safety Agency and by the International Civil Aviation Organisation, as part of its international obligations.

Arrangements will be made - to include a competitive tendering process - to commence a Section 32 examination this year. The terms of reference for this examination will be published as part of a public tendering process, the outcome of which will be made known when completed.

Irish Aviation Authority

203. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if there will

be no changes to the terms and conditions of employment for SRD workers unless agreed through engagement with workers and their representatives (details supplied). [23842/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Government Decision to merge the regulatory and safety functions of the IAA's Safety Regulation Division with the Commission for Aviation Regulation (CAR) will be done in accordance with established practice for structural reform processes within the Irish public sector. In any such process it is well established that the terms and conditions of existing workers will be no less favourable, unless by agreement.

I am mindful of the importance of the industrial relations component involved in any transitional arrangements involving the movement of personnel from one entity to another, and I can assure the Deputy that there will be regular engagement with the affected staff and their representative bodies throughout the reform process.

Airport Development Projects

204. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he is satisfied that the proposed new runway 10L-28R will meet all technical requirements to facilitate modern long range aircraft. [23843/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the deputy is aware, daa holds statutory responsibility for the management, operation and development of Dublin Airport, including the delivery of the North Runway project.

I have been informed that North Runway will be 3,100 metres in length. It will have a Category III instrument landing system and has been designed to accommodate Code F aircraft. In this context, the daa is satisfied that the new runway will facilitate any modern long range aircraft that are expected to operate from Dublin Airport.

Dublin Airport Authority

205. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he is satisfied that the infrastructure at Dublin Airport, such as taxiways, ramp area and contact stands are adequate to cater for existing aircraft operations. [23844/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the deputy is aware, daa holds statutory responsibility for the management, operation and development of Dublin Airport, including the provision of adequate capacity to meet current and future demand.

Passenger traffic at Dublin Airport in 2017 increased to almost 30 million. As this growth trend is expected to continue, albeit at a slower pace, capacity concerns at Dublin Airport in the short, medium and longer term are being managed and addressed in a number of ways.

In the short to medium term, I understand that the daa has a programme of works underway at the Airport, which comprises a suite of passenger-processing, stands and airfield projects required to deliver passenger growth to end-2019. With further passenger growth envisaged beyond 2019, additional infrastructure will be required to ensure the sustainable development of the Airport in accordance with a new Dublin Airport Masterplan. The next Capital Investment Programme, due to be finalised by the Commission for Aviation Regulation next year, will provide an allowance for necessary investment in capital infrastructure at the Airport from 2020.

To ensure that Dublin Airport, along with our other State airports at Cork and Shannon, are prepared for the longer term to 2050, a Review of their capacity need is now underway. In the case of Dublin Airport only, the study is considering the time frame for the development of new terminal capacity – Terminal 3 – and its appropriate design and optimum location as well as an assessment of the relative advantages and disadvantages of the funding and operation of Terminal 3 by the existing airport operator in comparison to being operated on an independent basis. I expect the review to be completed shortly.

Ministerial Meetings

206. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a meeting will be organised with Monaghan County Council to discuss roads funding for an area (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23858/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): A meeting will be arranged at a time and date that is mutually convenient and appropriate.

Rural Transport Programme Funding

207. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the once-off community grant of Louth-Meath Fingal LocalLink. [23859/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport Authority (NTA) has national responsibility for integrated local and rural transport, including, since 2012, management of the Rural Transport Programme which now operates under the “Local Link” brand.

In light of the NTA’s responsibilities regarding Local Link services, I have referred the Deputy’s question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Transport Infrastructure Ireland Projects

208. **Deputy Patrick O’Donovan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if TII and the NRA have ever accommodated an existing business with a junction interchange realignment as part of a motorway project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23910/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for TII in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy’s question to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don’t receive a reply within 10 working days.

209. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of times the 220X bus in County Cork left its route within the past three months; the reason for the bus to take a different route; and if it is Bus Éireann policy that buses go off route if they are running late. [23928/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for The National Transport Authority (NTA), in conjunction with Bus Éireann, and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

National Car Test

210. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the steps being taken in relation to an issue (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23978/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Car Test which was introduced to comply with an EU Roadworthiness Testing Directive, is aimed at helping to prevent avoidable accidents and improving road safety, and a car which passes this test may be driven on our roads.

The Cost of Insurance Working Group, now chaired by Minister of State Michael D'Arcy at the Department of Finance and the Department of Public Expenditure, examined the issue of the cost of motor insurance including an examination of the issue raised by you. The Report of that Group and subsequent updates can be found here - www.finance.gov.ie/what-we-do/insurance/the-cost-of-insurance-working-group/.

The Cost of Insurance Working Group Report commented that an 'older vehicle may have a greater risk of injury due to its lack of safety features compared to a modern vehicle' (See Point 2.4 Underwriting Risks and Coverages, Section vii. Vehicle details on page 29 of the Report). Research by the Road Safety Authority indicates that in the event of a collision, the level of personal injury to an individual in an older car can be significantly higher than if that person was driving a new car. Safety features on newer cars can include greater use of airbags, electronic stability, improved braking systems, roll-over protection, etc., all of which are designed to reduce the impact of a collision on the occupants. A higher overall level of personal injury payout may be one factor that leads some insurance companies to consider older cars a higher risk in terms of potential payouts when underwriting a policy.

If a person is unable to obtain a quotation for motor insurance or feels that the premium proposed or the terms are so excessive that it amounts to a refusal to give them motor insurance, they should contact Insurance Ireland, 5 Harbourmaster Place, IFSC, Dublin 1 Postcode DO1 E7E8 quoting the Declined Cases Agreement email : declined@insuranceireland.eu Tel. 01.6761820. See www.insuranceireland.eu/consumer-information/general-non-life-insurance/declined-cases-agreement. Under the Declined Cases Agreement, which all motor insurers must adhere to under the Central Bank's 'General Good Requirements for Insurance and Reinsurance Undertakings', a Declined Cases Committee, including consumer representatives, deal with any cases of difficulty in obtaining motor insurance.

Social Insurance

211. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if there is recourse in respect of a person that has a small number of PRSI stamps paid by their employer for the duration of their working life. [23814/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Department will carry out a review of the record of any person who makes contact, advising of the possibility that contributions may be missing from their social insurance record.

Such a review can take a number of forms, depending on the nature of the issues raised; and can include (but is not limited to) the following;

- Examination of any documentation provided by the customer
- A full check of the Department's systems for the employment
- A check for Revenue returns relating to the period in question
- Referral to a social welfare inspector for a full investigation into the period concerned.

All cases where contributions may be missing are investigated in full; and in each case a decision as to the outcome for the customer's social insurance record is made and communicated back to the customer.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Housing Assistance Payment

212. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the location a HAP applicant can redeem the full cost of rent which they have had to borrow in order to pay the rent while the HAP application is being processed; if her attention has been drawn to the fact that a HAP application can take 12 to 15 weeks to be processed and is not backdated, therefore the applicant will have to borrow money to pay the rent in the interim; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23831/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme is administered by Local Authorities and overall policy responsibility for HAP rests with my colleague the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government. Matters relating to the processing times for HAP applications and the payment of arrears are primarily a matter for that Department.

Notwithstanding this, I understand that arrears may be paid in cases where a housing need assessment is complete; the applicant is accepted on the social housing list and a valid HAP application is received by the Local Authority.

The Deputy will be aware that the strategic policy direction of my Department is to return rent supplement, with approximately 31,000 cases in payment, to its original purpose of being a short-term income support with the introduction of the HAP scheme. There are currently 36,500 HAP tenancies in payment, and officials in my Department will continue to support the transfer of cases from rent supplement who have long term social housing needs.

I suggest that the specific matter in relation to lead times in receiving rental payment via HAP is clarified with the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government.

Departmental Reports

213. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a report on part-time and seasonal workers in County Donegal will be published; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23832/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department's main social welfare schemes for people who are unemployed are the jobseeker's allowance and the jobseekers benefit schemes. Both schemes provide significant support to individuals so that they can work up to 3 days a week and still retain access to a reduced jobseeker's payment. The 2018 Estimates for my Department provide for expenditure this year on the jobseeker's schemes of €2.17 billion.

An Taoiseach, in his previous role as Minister for Social Protection, gave a commitment at Dáil report stage of the Social Welfare Bill 2016 that he would ask officials to examine the issue of jobseeker's benefit and the treatment of part-time and seasonal workers, including those categorised as having a subsidiary employment. My Department has completed a report on jobseekers benefit and the treatment of seasonal and part time workers which I am examining.

On 7th December 2017, I published the Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2017. The Bill delivers on the commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government to tackle the problems caused by the increased casualisation of work and to strengthen the regulation of precarious work. The Bill completed Committee Stage on 17th May last.

This very important piece of legislation will improve the security and predictability of working hours for employees on insecure contracts and those working variable hours in all sectors of employment.

My Department is currently collating data on jobseekers benefit recipients in subsidiary employment. We will have 12 months of data gathered shortly and this will assist me in making an informed decision on this issue.

I intend to submit the report on jobseekers benefit and the treatment of seasonal and part-time workers to the Joint Oireachtas Committee. The report will be published subsequently and will be made available to all members.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

214. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for a carer's allowance by a person (details supplied). [23872/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): An application for carer's allowance (CA) was received from the person concerned on 21 February 2017.

It is a condition for receipt of a CA that the person being cared for must have a disability whose effect is that they require full-time care and attention.

This is defined as requiring from another person, continual supervision and frequent assistance throughout the day in connection with normal bodily functions or continual supervision in order to avoid danger to him or herself and likely to require that level of care for at least twelve

months.

The evidence submitted in support of this application was examined and the deciding officer decided that this evidence did not indicate that the requirement for full-time care was satisfied.

The person concerned was notified on 10 May 2017 of this decision, the reason for it and of their right of review and appeal.

My department were notified on 12 June 2017 that the person concerned had appealed this decision to the Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO). A submission in support of the decision was forwarded to the SWAO on 19 June 2017.

On 20 February 2018 the SWAO notified the person concerned that their appeal was disallowed.

Additional evidence was supplied to the SWAO resulting in a review of this decision. On 22 May 2018 the SWAO notified the person concerned that the outcome of the review is that the original decision is confirmed.

Under Social Welfare legislation, the decision of an Appeals Officer is final and conclusive and may only be reviewed in the light of relevant additional evidence or new facts.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals

215. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the provisions, legal or otherwise, whereby a deciding officer can issue a decision in respect of section 302(b) of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 as amended in respect of the same appeal (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23906/18]

216. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an appeals officer is also considered to be a deciding officer; if there are differences in respect of the aforementioned officers and their remits; the details of the differences; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23907/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions No. 215 and 216 together.

Part 10 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act, 2005 (as amended) sets down the roles, powers and functions of deciding officers and appeals officers. Deciding officers are appointed by the Minister under section 299 of the Act. Section 301 of the Act provides for the questions which shall be decided by a deciding officer.

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. Appeals Officers are appointed by the Minister under section 304 of the Act.

Section 302 of the Act provides for the effective date of revised decisions. The effective date can be the date of a previous decision, the date of some new fact or evidence of a change of circumstances or a current date.

Section 302(a) relates to situations where there is evidence that the person deliberately gave

false or misleading information or deliberately concealed relevant information. When a revised decision is made under section 302(a) it must take effect retrospectively.

Section 302(b) is invoked where new facts or new evidence have come to light but there is no evidence that the person deliberately gave false or misleading information or deliberately concealed relevant facts. Under this provision a deciding officer has the power to determine the effective date of a revised decision, having regard to the new facts or new evidence and to the circumstances of the case. In cases where the effect of the revised decision is to reduce or disallow a payment but the revised decision is made effective from a current date there is no overpayment.

In accordance with section 311(3) of the Act an appeals officer, when deciding a question shall not be confined to the grounds on which the decision of the deciding officer was based, but may decide the question as if it were being decided for the first time. This means that an appeals officer when determining an appeal can decide that section 302(b) instead of section 302(a) is the appropriate provision for that case.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

School Meals Programme

217. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 281, 282 and 283 of 10 May 2018, the results of the on-site inspection programmes implanted since 2012 to ensure that the school food scheme rules are being adhered to, including an assessment of the type of food provided; if annual reports or figures are produced on the assessment of the scheme from same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23982/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The School Meals Programme provides funding to some 1,580 schools and organisations benefiting 250,000 children at a cost of €54 million in 2018.

The objective of the Scheme is to provide regular, nutritious food to children who are unable, due to lack of good quality food, to take full advantage of the education provided to them.

As the Deputy will be aware the Department commenced inspection of schools in 2012. Reports on the results of the inspections have been compiled in respect of each year. The report for 2017 is being compiled at present and inspections for 2018 are ongoing. A report will be compiled for 2018 in due course. A summary of results for the years in which reports are available is appended to this reply. Copies of the reports for 2012 to 2016 inclusive will be forwarded to the Deputy under separate cover. All issues arising in non-compliant and partially compliant cases are followed up by the Department.

The Deputy will be aware that '*Nutrition Standards for School Meals*' published in September 2017 under the auspices of Healthy Ireland, is a valuable resource to enable and promote healthy eating and healthy lifestyles in schools. These standards complement and strengthen the healthy eating guidelines that were already in place. The standards were introduced commencing from January 2018 and all schools participating in the school meals scheme are expected to fully comply with these standards from September 2018. The requirement to implement these nutrition standards is met by the schools and organisations who are responsible for the delivery model and choice of supplier to be used. Compliance with the new standards will form part of the inspection process from the 2018/2019 academic year.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Appendix

School Meals Scheme inspections and outcomes 2012 - 2016

Reference year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Total number of organisations in the scheme*	1,020	999	997	1,330	1,330
Total number of organisations inspected	60	105	81	84	297
Outcome					
Non-compliant	1	1	-	4	6
Partially compliant	7	7	17	9	40
Compliant	51	95	62	71	251

*The number of individual schools inspected is higher, because some organisations provide services to a number of schools.

Planning Issues

218. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if school facilities are taken into consideration when reviewing planning applications for housing developments by the county councils; if there is provision in planning regulations to provide quality child care and preschool facilities in view of the fact that they are lacking in some villages in which planning permission has been granted for large housing developments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23849/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In light of the Programme for Government commitment regarding educational impact assessment on residential zoning to identify potential need for schools, the Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Local Area Plans, published in June 2013, highlight the importance of local authority engagement and co-operation with the Department of Education and Skills, and recommend that local area plans provide a realistic phasing timetable to ensure that the provision of school facilities is delivered in conjunction with the phased construction of housing.

In addition, prior to that, my Department jointly published with the Department of Education, The Provision of Schools and the Planning System - A Code of Practice, in August 2008. The Code sets out co-ordinated actions to be taken in relation to forecasting future demand for school places by the Department of Education and Skills and planning for the provision of school sites within the planning system, as well as the efficient handling of planning applications and associated consultations by the relevant planning authorities to expedite school delivery.

With regard to assessing the implications of local authority development planning on the issue of schools and school provision in a given area, local authorities are obliged under the Code of Practice to take this matter into account in preparing and finalising their plans, working in conjunction with the relevant forward planning and new school sections of the Department of Education and Skills.

Furthermore, section 10(2)(1) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) requires a development plan to include objectives for “the provision, or facilitation of the provision, of services for the community including, in particular, schools, crèches and other educa-

tion and childcare facilities”. This requirement is restated in my Department’s 2007 Development Plan Guidelines for Planning Authorities which, together with the Code of Practice, are available on my Department’s website at the following links:

www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/migrated-files/en/Publications/Developmentand-Housing/Planning/FileDownload%2C14468%2Cen.pdf.

www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/migrated-files/en/Publications/Developmentand-Housing/Planning/FileDownload%2C17998%2Cen.pdf.

Both I and the Minister for Education and Skills are statutory consultees for the purposes of local authority development plans. My Department will continue to work pro-actively with the Department of Education and Skills in ensuring the issue of schools provision is properly addressed in local authority plans and in assisting the Department of Education and Skills in ensuring that new schools are delivered in a timely and cost-effective manner and in line with the proper planning and sustainable development of the areas in which they are needed.

Housing Issues

219. **Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the findings of the working group on rural housing will be published; the timeframe for the publication of new guidelines on rural housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23885/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Following engagement between the European Commission and my Department regarding the 2013 European Court of Justice ruling in the “Flemish Decree” case, a working group, comprising senior representatives from my Department and planning authorities, was established in May 2017 to review and, where necessary, recommend changes to the 2005 Planning Guidelines on Sustainable Rural Housing, issued under section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, with a view to ensuring that rural housing policies and objectives contained in local authority development plans comply with the relevant provisions of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

This Working Group concluded its deliberations in September 2017 and taking account of the Group’s analysis and recommended outcome, my Department has been engaging with the Commission on the matter, with a view to issuing a further circular letter to planning authorities as soon as possible, setting out revisions to the 2005 Guidelines that take account of the relevant ECJ judgment.

Building Regulations Compliance

220. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of inspections that have been carried out on apartment blocks to estimate the level of fire and safety defects present. [23894/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): Under the Building Control Acts 1990 to 2014, primary responsibility for compliance of works with the requirements of the Building Regulations, including Part B (Fire Safety), rests with the owners, designers and builders of buildings. Enforcement of the Building Regulations is a matter for the 31 local building control authorities, who have

extensive powers of inspection and enforcement under the Acts and who are independent in the use of their statutory powers.

In addition, local authorities also have extensive powers of inspection and enforcement under the Fire Services Acts 1981 and 2003, the Housing Acts and the Planning and Development Acts, all of which may be relevant where fire safety concerns arise in residential developments. Fire services may inspect buildings in cases of defects or complaints in respect of fire safety. They work with building owners to ensure immediate risks are addressed, and put a plan in place for works to bring buildings into compliance. They have enforcement powers for cases where co-operation is not forthcoming, or progress cannot be made on an agreed basis.

In addition in August 2017, I published a Framework for Enhancing Fire Safety in Dwellings, which is intended to be used as a guide by the owners and occupants of dwellings where fire safety deficiencies have been identified, or are a cause for concern. The Framework is also of assistance to professional advisors both in developing strategies to improve fire safety and in developing strategies to enable continued occupation in advance of undertaking the necessary works to ensure compliance with the relevant Building Regulations. The framework is available on my Department's website at the following link:

www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/framework_for_enhancing_fire_safety_in_dwellings.pdf.

In the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower tragedy in June 2017, and in recognition of fears expressed for fire safety, Minister Murphy tasked the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management with convening and coordinating a Task Force to lead a re-appraisal of our approach to fire safety in Ireland. He also tasked them to oversee a review of fire safety in local authority provided multi-storey, multi-unit social housing and a separate review of medium to high rise buildings (> 18 metres or 6 storeys). The Task Force has recently completed its report and this is now being examined urgently.

Separately, under the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2017, which apply to all properties let or available to let, local authorities also carry out inspections to check that rental properties comply with the regulations. This includes checking compliance with fire safety requirements, such as fire detection and alarm systems and emergency lighting.

Tenant Purchase Scheme Eligibility

221. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the tenant purchase scheme will be amended to allow tenants that are residing in Part V properties and that qualify for the scheme in their own right to purchase their houses in view of the fact that the scheme in its current format discriminates against these applicants; if the council will explain the current situation in relation to Part V; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23912/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme came into operation on 1 January 2016. The Scheme is open to eligible tenants, including joint tenants, of local authority houses that are available for sale under the Scheme. To be eligible, tenants must meet certain criteria, including having a minimum reckonable income of €15,000 per annum and having been in receipt of social housing support for at least one year.

The Housing (Sale of Local Authority Houses) Regulations 2015 governing the Scheme provide for a number of specified classes of houses to be excluded from sale, including hous-

es provided to local authorities under Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, houses specifically designed for older persons, group Traveller housing and houses provided to facilitate people with disabilities transferring from institutional care to community-based living.

The provisions of Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, are designed to enable the development of mixed tenure sustainable communities. Part V units are excluded from the Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme 2016 to ensure that units delivered under this mechanism will remain available for people in need of social housing support and that the original policy goals of the legislation are not eroded over time. The continued development of mixed tenure communities remains very important in promoting social integration.

Local authorities may also, within the provisions of the Regulations, exclude certain houses which, in the opinion of the authority, should not be sold for reasons such as proper stock or estate management. It is a matter for each individual local authority to administer the Scheme in its operational area in line with the over-arching provisions of the governing legislation for the scheme, and in a manner appropriate to its housing requirements.

In line with the commitment given in Rebuilding Ireland, a review of the first 12 months of the 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 some of which will necessitate amendments to primary legislation in order to be implemented. I hope to be in a position to publish the review shortly once an appropriate piece of legislation has been identified that can accommodate the recommended changes to the scheme.

Housing Policy

222. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he has discussed the percentage of new build and regenerated social housing that will be allocated to those experiencing homelessness in each local authority; the percentage of new build that went to those experiencing homelessness in each local authority in 2017; the percentage that will go to those experiencing homelessness in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23920/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department does not hold information on the allocation of social housing supports to different categories of households on local authority waiting lists. The allocation of such support is a matter for each local authority in accordance with its allocation scheme made under Section 22 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 and associated regulations.

Local Authority Staff Data

223. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of engineers employed by Cork County Council; and the number of architects employed by the same local authority by grade. [23929/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):

My Department oversees workforce planning for the local government sector, including the monitoring of local government sector employment levels. To this end, my Department gathers quarterly data on staff numbers in local authorities; however, the data gathered does not provide details in terms of the number of engineers and the number of architects employed by Cork County Council. Accordingly, the information requested is not available in my Department, but may be obtained directly from the local authority concerned.

High-level staffing numbers for the local authority sector are available on the Public Service Numbers Databank which is hosted and maintained by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and is available at the following link: <http://databank.per.gov.ie/>, providing access to information from 1980 onwards.

Legislative Programme

224. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the status of the main provisions and the current status of the Heritage Bill 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23878/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): The Heritage Bill, which has passed all stages in Seanad Éireann, passed Committee stage in Dáil Éireann on 8 May 2018 and will now proceed for Report stage debate on a date to be scheduled by the Oireachtas.

The Bill has three main Parts, amending the Canals Act 1986, the Wildlife Acts and the Heritage Act 1995.

The principal purpose of the Bill is to implement the Report of the Critical Review of the Heritage Council approved by Government in 2013.

The Bill also amends the Canals Act 1986 to allow the making of bye-laws by Waterways Ireland for the regulation of boating and management of the canals.

The Bill also provides for controlled burning of vegetation under strict regulation in the month of March on a pilot basis for a two year period, and for the managed cutting of roadside hedges, under strict regulation, in August, again for a two year pilot period. The Bill clarifies the powers of authorised officers under the Wildlife Acts and harmonises the provisions of the Roads Act 1993 with the Wildlife Acts.