

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 12, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 13 to 15, inclusive, resubmitted.

Taoiseach's Meetings and Engagements

16. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his recent meeting with a person (details supplied). [27645/18]

The Taoiseach: I met Tim Cook, Chief Executive of Apple, on 18th June in Dublin. Apple is a major investor in the country, and employs more than 5,000 people in Ireland – mostly in Cork. I regularly meet with companies with a presence in Ireland, and it is right for me to do so.

Indeed, during our meeting, Mr. Cook highlighted Apple's continued investment in Ireland, in particular a new extension to the Cork facility which was completed in May of this year.

We discussed some topical issues including the impact of Brexit, the digital single market, digital taxation and data protection.

We also discussed the European Commission's State Aid case and noted that payments are being made by Apple, in accordance with the agreed schedule, into the escrow fund which has been set up pending the appeal submitted to the European Court of Justice. Finally, we discussed the Athenry data centre site, and noted the new policy and legal frameworks that we are putting in place in relation to future data centre development.

Questions Nos. 17 to 52, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 53 to 64, inclusive, answered orally.

Schools Mental Health Strategies

65. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on recent calls for a nationwide primary schools' counselling service. [29344/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The calls to which the Deputy refers arise from a recently published report commissioned by St Patrick's Mental Health services. The report includes an analysis of the findings from a survey of primary-school principals and interviews with twelve principals and nine counsellors, and makes certain recommendations.

While the report has not been formally submitted to my Department, it has been seen by

relevant officials.

From a preliminary consideration of the report, it does not appear to set out the context of the supports already provided by my Department to support schools in the promotion of well-being and the prevention of mental health difficulties. The report highlights the importance of the promotion of emotional wellbeing in primary schools as a critical factor for both academic progression and school engagement. My Department promotes a whole-school, preventative, multi-component approach to the promotion of wellbeing and positive mental health in schools. It supports the provision of interventions at both the universal level, focusing on the entire school community, and targeted levels, focusing on building the skills of groups and individual young people with identified need. My Department's support services, including NEPS, help build school capacity in this regard.

NEPS psychologists do not generally provide therapeutic interventions as part of their work in schools. Where they encounter cases, however, where specialist services are required for a student they provide support for the onward referral of those students. In the coming weeks, I intend to publish my Department's Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice. This policy statement provides an overarching structure encompassing ongoing and developing work to further support schools in the area of wellbeing promotion. Part of the implementation of that policy includes an action that the provision of therapeutic interventions to children will be examined within the context of the Youth Mental Health Pathfinder Project. At present, the provision of counselling services to children falls within the province of the HSE and my colleague the Minister for Health.

Question No. 66 answered orally.

State Examinations

67. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the issue of non-teachers marking leaving certificate examination papers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29329/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The State Examinations Commission appoints approximately 3,600 examiners annually to mark the Leaving and Junior Certificate written examinations. The primary requirement for examiners is subject competence. The SEC has a strict policy when it comes to the recruitment of examiners which requires that personnel appointed to mark the state examinations are appropriately qualified. The Commission advises:

- Examiners appointed are selected on the basis of their academic qualifications, their teaching experience and their examining experience.

- All examiners are appropriately qualified for the work.
- Most of them are experienced serving and retired teachers.
- A large number of experienced examiners are reappointed each year
- When making new appointments, priority is given to teachers
- All appointments are overseen by the Chief Examiner

This year, as in every year, the Commission prioritised qualified teachers to correct the exams but every year there is a very small portion of examiners who are qualified in the subject

area they are correcting but who are not qualified teachers. In 2017, a very small proportion (20 or 1.9% of all Junior Cycle examiners and 2 or 0.1% of all Leaving Certificate Examiners) held a qualification in the relevant subject but did not have a teaching qualification. However, it is important to emphasise that all examiners go through rigorous training and their work is monitored by an experienced member of the examining team who samples their work throughout the marking process. The Commission takes corrective action in any case where an examiner's work falls below the required standard. These measures are designed to ensure the fair, accurate and consistent marking of every candidate's work.

DEIS Scheme

68. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason the staffing formula for designated DEIS schools has not been improved to coincide with two improvements in the overall formula for other primary schools in recent years; his plans to improve the formula for DEIS schools for the coming school year in view of research evidence showing the importance of smaller class size, especially for younger children and those affected by socio-economic disadvantage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29298/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Tackling educational disadvantage is a key priority for my Department. In order to achieve its vision for education to become a proven pathway to better opportunities for those in communities at risk of disadvantage and social exclusion, my Department has set the implementation of a renewed DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) programme as one of its key priorities.

Evaluations of DEIS to date have shown an overall improvement in educational outcomes in DEIS schools. DEIS Plan 2017 aims to build on what has already been achieved by schools who have benefitted from the additional supports available under the initial DEIS programme introduced in 2005. Extra supports have been extended to 109 schools which will benefit over 20,000 students.

While the allocation of additional teaching resources to DEIS Band 1 schools has served to improve learning outcomes, a gap still remained between DEIS and non-DEIS schools in terms of educational outcomes. Under DEIS Plan 2017, there is a commitment to carry out an evaluation of the level of teaching resources for schools participating in the School Support Programme. My Department established a Working Group to examine Class Size in late 2017.

To date there have been two meetings of this group and work is underway on examining the various issues that arise in terms of determining optimum class size. It is intended that a short report will be prepared by the Working group which will be referred to the Advisory Group for consideration.

My Department's Circulars govern staffing arrangements in all schools and are available on my Department's website.

Education Policy

69. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which he expects to be in a position to address the most pressing issues in the education sphere over the next three years with particular reference to such issues as class size, accommodation requirements and the capitation grant requirements in view of the needs set out in the recent document produced by a union (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[29371/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I have set out the ambition to deliver the best education and training service in Europe by 2026. This Government has already made significant provision to support this ambition.

The mid-term capital review made provision for increased investment in my Department's School Capital Programme.

That Programme has been delivering an average of 18,000 school places per year in major projects and close to 8,000 per year in smaller scale additional accommodation. This building programme has allowed us meet the needs for extra places for an exceptional period of pupil growth at both primary and secondary level (up by over 100,000) and to expand provision of special education units in mainstream schools from 548 to 1304.

This programme has facilitated the employment of nearly 6,000 extra teachers and 3,000 SNAs in a three year period which has also seen two reductions in the primary pupil teacher ratio.

My Department is satisfied that the €8.4 billion capital investment in the National Development Plan (2018 to 2027) is sufficient to deliver the necessary school infrastructure. This is a 70% increase on the €4.9 billion in the previous 10 years (2008-2017).

I fully acknowledge the areas which the Deputy has mentioned in his question are important for investment going forward and I will be competing at cabinet for funding in the next budget.

The Deputy will appreciate it would be premature to speculate what precise level of resources will be available across all Government departments or individual departments in advance of the budgetary process.

In recent years the Government has prioritised new, more modern school buildings; additional teachers; a lower pupil-teacher ratio; the introduction of new subjects at leaving certificate - physical education and computer science, for example; the restoration of funding to our universities. I will be taking into account budgetary submissions from all the relevant education stakeholders.

Question No. 70 answered orally.

School Curriculum

71. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to implement a non-ethos based sex education programme in schools as recommended by the Citizens' Assembly; if such plans will encompass the issues of consent and LGBT+ pupils; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29418/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In April of this year, I announced a major review of the Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) curriculum and this review, by the National Council on Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), is underway.

The review will cover both the content of the RSE curriculum and support materials, as well as the delivery of the curriculum in schools.

Some elements of the current RSE curriculum are twenty years old and I believe that it is now time to carry out a major review of the curriculum to ensure that it is fit for purpose and

meets the needs of young people today in modern Ireland.

In relation to the content of the curriculum, I have asked the NCCA to specifically consider a number of areas in conducting its evaluation. These include:

- Consent, what it means and its importance;
- Developments in contraception;
- Healthy, positive sexual expression and relationships;
- Safe use of the internet;
- Social media and its effects on relationships and self-esteem;
- LGBTQ+ matters.

I have also asked the NCCA to examine the experience and reality of RSE as delivered in schools. This will provide an opportunity for teachers, students, principals and parents to be consulted about RSE in their particular contexts.

Every student has a right to access information about sexual health, relationships and sexuality, and this must be delivered in a factual manner in every school, regardless of the ethos of the school. This review will help to inform decisions regarding the content of the curriculum and how it is delivered.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

72. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a report on the implementation of the National Council for Special Education's policy advice on educational provision for children with autism spectrum disorder will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29345/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): A key priority for this government is ensuring that children with special educational needs are supported and given the opportunity to reach their full potential.

In 2018, some €1.78 billion will be invested in Special Education. This represents an increase of almost 42% since 2011 and amounts to almost one fifth of the Department's overall Budget.

The National Council for Special Education's Policy Advice on Educational Provision for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders was published in July 2016. The report acknowledges that there has been substantial investment in the education of students with autism over the 14 years since the publication of the last major report on autism in 2001. The report sets out 11 recommendations, for further improvement and outlines associated actions to give effect to its recommendations. Many of these recommendations relate to the services provided by other Departments or agencies including the HSE.

My Department has convened an Implementation Group with representatives of the NCSE, NEPS, the Inspectorate and representatives from other Departments and agencies to ensure that the Report's recommendations are fully and appropriately considered.

While a number of the recommendations including those on the development of additional primary and post primary provision, have already been partially or substantially implemented,

work is planned on the implementation of the remaining recommendations including those for other parties.

It is acknowledged that the implementation of a number of the recommendations including that on the development of an alternative scheme to the Extended School Year scheme will be challenging. I have asked my officials to prepare a progress report setting out expected time-frames for full implementation and I expect that report by early Autumn.

Education and Training Provision

73. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the statement of IBEC that as many as 80,000 additional construction workers will be required to meet infrastructure targets; if adequate plans are in place to meet the training needs for that number in the specific skills associated with construction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29295/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): I am aware of the report referred to in the Deputy's question regarding projected significant additional demand for construction workers to meet infrastructural priorities set out in the National Development Plan (NDP).

I can assure the Deputy that securing additional skills supply from education and training to meet the requirements of the construction sector is a major focus of my Department as part of the broader Government actions to increase housing supply and successfully implement the NDP and the National Planning Framework (NPF) under Project Ireland 2040.

In this context, as the Deputy may be aware, a Construction Sector Working Group is being established to ensure regular and open dialogue between Government and the construction sector in relation to issues that may impact on the successful delivery of the NDP on a value-for-money basis for the State. As set out in the NDP, part of the Construction Group's remit will be to consider the supply of necessary skills and enhancing the capacity of the sector. The NDP also highlights the importance of examining the role of Building Information Modelling and adopting other technologies and innovative practices in driving improving productivity and efficiencies. The work of the Group will, therefore have an important role to play in ensuring that the construction sector enhances its capacity to meet infrastructural priorities over the next decade.

In responding to specific skill needs for the construction sector, a particular focus of my Department and the education and training sector more generally has been the expansion in apprenticeships spearheaded by the Apprenticeship Council.

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

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

The range of apprenticeships on offer is also being expanded to meet the identified skill needs of the sector. Arising from two calls for apprenticeship proposals three new apprentice-

ships in the construction sector are currently in development, Engineering Services Management, Scaffolding and Advanced Quantity Surveyor.

In addition to apprenticeship provision, almost 7,000 beneficiaries participated in SOLAS-funded construction related further education and training programmes provided by Education and Training Boards (ETBs) during 2017. Separately, following a series of discussions with the Construction Industry Federation, programmes have been put in place to produce approximately 100 form workers, 100 steel-fixers and 50 curtain wallers per year. SOLAS will continue to engage with the ETBs to expand provision to meet needs in these areas.

In conclusion, in responding to the broader issue of the appropriate level of employment in the construction sector, it will be important - as highlighted in the NDP - to be acutely conscious of the experience of the last fifteen years which highlighted the dangers for society and the economy when the construction sector expands too greatly and contracts too steeply.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

74. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the proposal to bring specialised therapists into schools and pre-schools will also provide services for applied behaviour analysis. [29225/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I recently announced that a demonstration project to provide in-school and pre-school therapy services will be introduced for the 2018/19 school year.

The project will be managed and coordinated by the National Council for Special Education.

The model has been developed by the Departments of Education, Children and Youth Affairs, Health, and the Health Service Executive, and is part of the government's overall aim to help every child to fulfil their full potential.

75 schools, including a representative sample of primary, post primary, and special schools will take part in the project. 75 pre-schools will also participate.

The project is taking place in the Community Healthcare Organisation 7 Region of South West Dublin, Kildare and West Wicklow.

As part of the programme, 19 speech and language therapists and 12 Occupational Therapists will be recruited by the HSE to work with the 150 schools and pre-schools.

The purpose of the project is to test a model of tailored therapeutic supports that allows for early intervention in terms of providing speech and language and occupational therapy within 'educational settings'. This innovative pilot will complement existing HSE funded provision of essential therapy services.

The pilot is designed to test the provision of speech and language and occupational therapies in schools settings. It therefore does not include Applied Behaviour Analysis.

The Special Education Support Service (SESS) which is now part of the NCSE support service, provides training for teachers and schools in a range of programmes, including Applied Behaviour Analysis.

Schools Building Projects Status

75. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the delivery of a permanent school building for a school (details supplied) and the plans for temporary accommodation for the 2018-19 school year. [29237/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): This project is being delivered under my Department's "Rapid" Design & Build programme. The brief for the project is to provide a new 24 classroom primary school with a 3 classroom Special Needs Unit on a green field site at Carr's Hill, Douglas, to the south west side of Carrigaline Road, Maryborough, Co. Cork.

An application for planning permission was lodged on 28 May 2018.

The project is expected to proceed to tender in Quarter 3 2018. It is anticipated that construction will begin in early 2019 with delivery anticipated by the end of Quarter 1 2020.

The project for additional temporary accommodation for the school for September 2018 has been devolved to the patron body Educate Together. The Patron body appointed a consultant engineer in February 2018, to assist with the delivery of this accommodation.

Planning permission to consolidate the school in a single 12 classroom unit on the Garryduff Sports Centre site was sought from Cork county Council on 21 March 2018. Full Planning permission was granted on 14 June 2018.

To expedite the project my Department gave sanction to the patron body to run the tender process for the provision of the temporary accommodation required in tandem with the planning application. A contract for this provision was awarded in May 2018 (subject to planning permission).

Site works have commenced on the Garryduff site and it is anticipated that the accommodation will be delivered in time for the new academic year in September 2018.

School Accommodation Provision

76. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the action being taken to help oversubscribed secondary schools in Fingal, County Dublin. [29393/18]

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

This announcement included three new post-primary schools to be established in the Fingal area as follows:

- A new 1,000 pupil post-primary school to serve the Donaghmede_Howth_D13 school planning area to be established in 2019;

- A new 800 pupil post-primary school to serve the Blanchardstown_West D15 & BlanchardstownVge_D15 school planning areas as a regional solution to be established in 2020; and

- A new 800 pupil post-primary school to serve the Donaghmede_Howth_D13 school planning area to be established in 2021.

In addition to the new schools announced, my Department's capital investment programme also provides for devolved funding for additional classrooms for existing schools where an immediate enrolment need has been identified.

I have highlighted that the requirement for new schools will be kept under on-going review and in particular would have regard for the increased rollout of housing provision as outlined in Project Ireland 2040.

Teachers' Remuneration

77. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of efforts to achieve pay equality within the teaching profession; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28856/18]

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

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

Section 11 of the Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017 provides that "the Minister [for Public Expenditure and Reform] shall, within three months of the passing of this Act, prepare and lay before the Oireachtas a report on the cost of and a plan in dealing with pay equalisation for new entrants to the public service."

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

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

The Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform's report will inform discussions among the parties to the agreement on remaining salary scale issues in accordance with the commitment in the Agreement to consider the issue of new entrants' pay. That process commenced with a first meeting on 12 October 2017. The three teacher unions attended that meeting. Further talks were held on the 27th of April with all public service unions in relation to new entrant pay. Engagement between the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the trade unions has been ongoing and meetings are currently taking place as the parties continue to work through

the various aspects of this issue.

Schools Site Acquisitions

78. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the location for a new secondary school for the Castleknock-Carpenterstown area of Dublin 15; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28855/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, the school to which he refers is included in my Department's 6 year construction programme.

Officials in my Department continue to liaise with officials in Fingal County Council in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding in relation to the identification and acquisition of a suitable location for the school in question and have identified a preferred site option within the relevant school planning areas. Negotiations with the landowner in respect of this proposed acquisition are currently ongoing.

Due to commercial sensitivities relating to site acquisitions generally, the Deputy will appreciate that I am not in a position to provide further details at this time but I can confirm that the school patron is being kept apprised of developments in respect of the site acquisition process.

Schools Building Projects Status

79. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress on the provision of a new school in Trumera, Mountrath, County Laois; and the projected timescale for same. [29331/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that a building project for a new school has been approved for Trumera National School. A letter of approval issued to the school authority on 11th June 2018 in this regard.

The delivery of the project has been devolved to the school authority who will now arrange for the progression of the project through the design stages and on to construction.

School Accommodation Provision

80. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the expansion to primary school provision in Ashbourne, County Meath. [29342/18]

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

In addition to the new schools announced, there will be a need for further school accommodation in other areas in the future which, based on the current analysis, can be addressed through either planned capacity increases in existing schools or additional accommodation or

extensions to existing schools.

In line with the ongoing review of school planning areas generally, I can confirm that my Department is currently reviewing the position in relation to primary provision for the Ashbourne school planning area. My Department is aware of issues raised by schools regarding pressure on school places in the Ashbourne area for September 2018. In that regard, my Department officials recently met with the Ashbourne primary school principals and further discussions are ongoing with school patrons in relation to the expected enrolment position in each school and with the aim of ensuring that there is adequate accommodation to cater for the demand for places next September.

Schools Mental Health Strategies

81. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the recent survey by Dublin City University's school of nursing and human sciences of primary school principals and counsellors dealing with children from four to 13 years of age. [29323/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The issue to which the Deputy refers arise from a recently published report commissioned by St Patrick's Mental Health services. The report includes an analysis of the findings from a survey of primary-school principals and interviews with twelve principals and nine counsellors, and makes certain recommendations.

While the report has not been formally submitted to my Department, it has been seen by relevant officials.

From a preliminary consideration of the report, it does not appear to set out the context of the supports already provided by my Department to support schools in the promotion of well-being and the prevention of mental health difficulties. The report highlights the importance of the promotion of emotional wellbeing in primary schools as a critical factor for both academic progression and school engagement. My Department promotes a whole-school, preventative, multi-component approach to the promotion of wellbeing and positive mental health in schools. It supports the provision of interventions at both the universal level, focusing on the entire school community, and targeted levels, focusing on building the skills of groups and individual young people with identified need. My Department's support services, including NEPS, help build school capacity in this regard.

NEPS psychologists do not generally provide therapeutic interventions as part of their work in schools. Where they encounter cases, however, where specialist services are required for a student they provide support for the onward referral of those students. In the coming weeks, I intend to publish my Department's Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice. This policy statement provides an overarching structure encompassing ongoing and developing work to further support schools in the area of wellbeing promotion. Part of the implementation of that policy includes an action that the provision of therapeutic interventions to children will be examined within the context of the Youth Mental Health Pathfinder Project. At present, the provision of counselling services to children falls within the province of the HSE and my colleague the Minister for Health.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

82. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to

reduce primary class sizes and DEIS class sizes in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28781/18]

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

Improvements to the staffing schedule at primary level in Budget 2016 and Budget 2018 brings the teacher allocation ratio to the most favourable ever seen at primary level. From this September, schools will operate on the basis of a general average of 1 classroom teacher for every 26 pupils with lower thresholds for DEIS Band 1 schools.

In the last two years, we have hired 5,000 additional new teachers and Budget 2018 provides for an additional 1280 teaching posts in the 2018/19 school year.

This budget measure delivers on a commitment made in the Confidence and Supply Agreement and Programme for Government to reduce primary schools class size.

Each 1 point adjustment to the primary staffing schedule is estimated to cost in the region of €16.5m per annum. Any additional improvement would have to be considered as part of the next annual budgetary process, alongside the many other demands from the education sector.

Schools Establishment

83. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 191 of 19 June 2018, the extent of the engagement with existing schools in Swords regarding the decision to prioritise the progression of a new primary school for Mooretown, Swords. [28859/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy will be aware, I recently announced plans for the establishment of 42 new schools over the next four years (2019 to 2022), including an 8-classroom primary school to be established in Swords North (Mooretown) in 2019 and an 8-classroom primary school to be established in Swords South in 2019. For school planning purposes, Mooretown is located in the Swords school planning area.

There are 13 primary schools and 4 post-primary schools to be established in September 2019 which includes the schools in Swords. It is envisaged that these schools will be established in interim accommodation initially pending permanent accommodation solutions being put in place as part of the Department's Design and Build Programme.

The Department recently tendered for and expects to appoint a Project Manager in July 2018 who will assist in the procurement of interim school accommodation for the schools opening in September 2019.

Regarding the permanent accommodation position, the Department is equally committed to the progression of permanent school projects for both schools announced. In the case of the new school being established in Swords North, the school building project concerned has reached a point where it has been possible to seek planning permission for the project.

Teaching Qualifications

84. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if one-in-five 14 year olds are being taught mathematics by a teacher who is not qualified in the subject; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29348/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will note that the performance of students in Ireland in mathematics is relatively high by international standards. The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study found that only six out of 39 countries obtained significantly higher mean scores than Ireland in mathematics.

The STEM Policy Statement and Implementation Plan, which I launched in November 2017, aims to make Ireland the best in Europe in STEM by 2026. Within our school system, new initiatives and curriculum developments will support greater participation and improved performance in STEM. Curricular reform at junior and senior cycle will provide enhanced opportunities for teaching and learning in those key subjects.

This will build on the good progress that has already been made. A report in 2010 by the University of Limerick showed that in a study of 51 schools, 48% of teachers in the study did not have a major teaching qualification in mathematics. With funding from the Department, over 1000 out-of-field maths teachers will have gained a post-graduate qualification through the a programme led by EPI-STEM, the National centre for STEM Education at University of Limerick, by 2020.

Significant progress has been made on this issue since 2010. However I recognise that there are still challenges and the achievement of our STEM goals will rely on the availability of suitably qualified teachers to meet our schools' needs. This is one of a range of issues being considered by the Teacher Supply Steering Group, that I recently established. Already, as I announced earlier this year, following consultation with the Irish Universities Association, extra places on initial teacher education programmes have been provided by the universities in targeted subjects, including in STEM, from September 2018.

The Steering Group last met on 29 June and I hope to be in a position to announce further measures in teacher supply over coming months.

School Patronage

85. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will report on the progress in the divestment of church run schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29415/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy may be aware, following on from the report of the Advisory Group to the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector, my Department undertook surveys of parental preferences in 43 areas of stable population in 2012 and 2013 to establish the level of parental demand for a wider choice in the patronage of primary schools within these areas. Analysis of the parental preferences expressed in each area surveyed indicated that there was sufficient parental demand to support changes in school patronage in 28 areas.

From 2013 to 2017, ten multi-denominational schools have opened under the patronage divesting process. As the Deputy may be aware, the divestment model does not involve building new schools but requires the availability of school premises vacated, for example, due to amalgamation or closure.

Given the modest pace of progress with the Patronage Divestment process, I developed the

new schools reconfiguration for diversity process, which is aimed at providing more multi-denominational and non-denominational schools across the country, in line with the choices of families and school communities and the Programme for Government commitment for 400 such schools by 2030. I believe that this new Schools Reconfiguration process, which involves the transfer of live schools, has the potential to significantly increase patron diversity in our school system. Already the first reconfiguration has successfully taken place, with Two-Mile Community National School opening in September 2017 under the “Early Movers” provision of this new process.

While these new structures are being introduced, my Department is continuing to work with the main stakeholders to progress delivery of diversity in areas already identified as part of the 2012 and 2013 surveys.

Schools Establishment

86. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress that has been made on the development of the new second level school at Ballincollig, County Cork, which was announced earlier in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29406/18]

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

In line with the policy on the use of state assets (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform Circulars 11/15 and 17/16), my Department will be seeking to maximize the use of sites already in my ownership and of available properties in the ownership of other State bodies, where these are considered suitable for the provision of accommodation for the newly announced schools. In addition as part of my Department’s ongoing engagement with Local Authorities in respect of statutory planning processes and under the MoU on school site acquisitions, my Department will be examining all potential suitable site options, including appropriately zoned sites, to serve the relevant area. Engagement with Cork County Council in respect of the identification of a suitable site for this school is already underway.

Taking into account all of the above, a decision will then be made as part of the site acquisition process in relation to an appropriate site for the school and this will be confirmed at the earliest possible date.

School Accommodation Provision

87. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress made on the ongoing review of the need for a new secondary school in south County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29362/18]

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

essary infrastructure.

In addition to the new schools announced, there will be a need for further school accommodation in other areas in the future. Based on the current analysis, this need can be addressed through either planned capacity increases in existing schools or additional accommodation or extensions to existing schools. Approximately 40% of extra school places are delivered by extending existing schools.

I have highlighted that the requirement for new schools will be kept under on-going review and in particular would have regard for the increased rollout of housing provision as outlined in Project Ireland 2040.

While the announcement did not include a new post-primary school in the South Kildare school planning areas, additional capacity in the region of 1,700 school places will be provided when projects at the following four schools in this area are completed:

- St. Conleth's Community College, Newbridge;
- Athy Community College, Athy;
- Cross and Passion Secondary School, Kilcullen; and
- St Paul's Secondary School, Monasterevin.

A building project for the Patrician College Newbridge is also included in my Department's 6 Year Construction Programme.

However, in line with the ongoing review of school planning areas generally, I can confirm that my Department is currently reviewing provision at post-primary level across the school planning areas in South Kildare.

Schools Refurbishment

88. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when funding will be provided to a school (details supplied) for roof replacement works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29238/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department has no record of receiving a recent application, for works referred to, from the school in question.

The latest interaction that my Department had with the school was in July 2017 and this related to the approval of an application from the school for an Emergency Works Grant in respect of essential works to the roof. These work are completed and the school drew down the final funding in this regard in September 2017.

School Curriculum

89. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will report on the inspection of relationships and sexuality education in primary and secondary schools; if measures are being taken to improve the delivery of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29392/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Provision for Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) in primary schools is currently evaluated through two main models of inspection: Curriculum Evaluations of Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Whole School Evaluations (WSE) where SPHE is one of the subjects of focus in the WSE. At post-primary level, provision for RSE is evaluated during Subject Inspections of SPHE in post-primary schools.

In addition, there are a number of other types of inspection during which inspectors review school planning documents to determine the provision a school is making for RSE. They include: Whole-School Evaluations – Management Leadership and Learning (WSE-MLLs) in primary and post-primary schools, Evaluations of Special Care Units, Evaluations of Centres for Education (Youthreach) and Evaluations of action planning for Improvement in DEIS schools (both primary and post-primary).

In April of this year, I announced a major review of the Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) curriculum and this review (by the NCCA) is underway.

The review will cover both the content of the RSE curriculum and support materials, as well as the delivery of the curriculum to students.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

90. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will report on the provision of autistic spectrum disorder specific classes in west County Dublin; if the provision of the classes will be increased; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29391/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department's policy is to provide for the inclusive education of children with special educational needs, including Autism, in mainstream school settings, unless such a placement would not be in the best interests of the child concerned, or the children with whom they will be educated.

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

Enrolment in a special class should only be considered where it has been demonstrated that a student requires the support of a special class because he/she is unable to learn effectively in a mainstream class for most or all of the school day even with appropriate supports.

Some students, although academically able to access the curriculum in mainstream, may find it too difficult to manage full-time placement there. This can be due to significant difficulties in areas such as behaviour or sensory needs which have not been ameliorated, even with appropriate intervention, in mainstream.

In order to access a special class a student must have a report from a relevant professional stating that:

- S/he has a disability in line with the designation of the special class in question and
- S/he has complex learning needs that require the support of a special class setting and the reasons why this is the case.

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

4 July 2018

There are 37 special schools and 218 special classes attached to mainstream schools in Dublin. Of these, 18 are ASD early intervention classes, 124 are primary ASD classes and 36 are post primary ASD classes. The number of ASD special classes in Co. Dublin have increased from 66 in 2011/2012 to 178 in 2017/2018.

The NCSE has informed my Department that to date they have sanctioned 17 new Special Classes in Co. Dublin for 2018/19 school year. This process is ongoing. The NCSE is continuing to work with schools, parents, NEPS, health professionals and other staff who are involved in the provision of services for children with special educational needs in Dublin, to ensure that each child has a school placement appropriate to their needs for the 2018/19 school year and beyond.

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.

My Department has acknowledged that in recent years the establishment of special class provision in some schools and communities has been challenging.

As part of the process of planning for future provision, a number of measures have been included in the Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2016 to provide certain powers to the NCSE to designate a school placement for a child in circumstances where a child is experiencing difficulties in securing enrolment.

The Bill also proposes powers for the Minister, in certain circumstances, to require a school to open a special class for children with special educational needs. This amendment will give the Minister the power to compel a school to open a special class or classes where the National Council for Special Education has identified a need for such provision within an area.

These proposed measures would further enhance the ability of my Department and the NCSE to plan for special class provision and to address issues in provision that may arise from time in time at local levels.

Guidelines for Boards of Management and Principals of Primary and Post Primary schools contain information on setting up and organising special classes, including information on resources which may be provided to schools to establish special classes are available to download from www.ncse.ie.

Schools Building Projects Status

91. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of progress on the building process and site transfer for a new school build (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29363/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am pleased to confirm for the Deputy that planning for a new building for the school to which he refers is progressing. The school's design team has been authorised to conduct the pre-qualification process in order to draw up shortlists of contractors for the project.

In the meantime, work is ongoing on concluding the conveyancing for the site and I can assure the Deputy that all parties continue to work to ensure the acquisition completes at the earliest possible date. It is not anticipated that the completion of conveyancing will impact on the timelines for delivery of the building project.

Schools Establishment

92. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 376 of 12 June 2018, if primary school children in Dublin 8 and 12 will be able to access a school (details supplied); and if not, the location in which they can access secondary education. [29235/18]

93. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to establish an Educate Together school in Dublin 12 to cater for the growing demand for non-denominational school places; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29416/18]

118. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will meet with parents and campaigners from a school (details supplied) to discuss concerns about places and capacity in non-denominational schools in the area. [29414/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 92, 93 and 118 together.

As the Deputies will be aware, in November 2016, I announced the patronage of a new 1,000 pupil post-primary school to be established in 2018 to serve the Dublin South City Centre area. This new school, which will be a co-educational, multi-denominational school under the patronage of Educate Together, will serve the Dublin_8 school planning area, along with the Dublin 2_Dublin 4 and Dublin 6_Clonskeagh school planning areas as a regional solution.

More recently, in April 2018, I announced plans for the establishment of 42 new schools over the next four years (2019 to 2022), including new post-primary schools for areas adjacent to Dublin 8 and Dublin 12 as follows:

- new 1,000 pupil post-primary school to be established in 2020 as a regional solution to serve the Dublin 6_Clonskeagh and Dublin_6W school planning areas.

- new 600 pupil post-primary school to be established in 2021 to serve the Dublin 2_Dublin 4 school planning area.

These new schools will reduce any pressure on schools in the adjacent school planning areas, including the Dublin 8 and 12 areas. It is important to note that the patronage of these new schools has not yet been decided.

A patronage process, which will be open to all patron bodies, will be run by my Department to decide who will operate these schools. Parental preferences for each patron and for the language of instruction, from parents of children who reside in the school planning areas concerned, together with the extent of diversity currently available in these areas, are key to decisions in relation to the outcome of this process.

All new schools established since 2011 to meet demographic demand are required to prioritise pupil applications from within the designated school planning area(s) which the school was established to serve. This does not preclude schools from enrolling pupils from outside of the designated school planning area where they have sufficient places, rather it reflects the need to accommodate in the first instance the demographic for which the school was established. My Department's priority is ensuring all pupils have access to a school place which unfortunately may not always result in a school place that is their first choice.

School Admissions

94. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to concerns raised by Irish speaking families who partake in foster care regarding the impact of the Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2016 and the way in which it could discriminate against them; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29218/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I have made clear during the passage of the Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2016 that I wish to support Irish medium schools and to ensure that the Bill does not unintendedly limit the opportunities of students who have attained a level of proficiency in the Irish language from pursuing their education through the medium of Irish.

Accordingly, I brought forward an amendment in the Dáil which was aimed at allowing Irish medium schools to give priority in admission to students who have a reasonable age appropriate level of oral fluency in the Irish language, where such fluency would be at risk of regressing if the student were not admitted to an Irish medium school.

However, having regard to certain concerns raised by members of the Dáil in relation to my amendment, I agreed to withdraw it and resubmit revised amendments to the Seanad.

In that regard, I can confirm that I have since brought forward amendments in the Seanad that will permit an Irish medium school to prioritise the admission of a student where the school is satisfied that the student has a level of fluency in the Irish language and where that fluency would be likely to regress were the child not admitted to an Irish language school.

In doing so, I have amended the definition of ‘level of fluency in the Irish language’ to provide that it means ‘a level of fluency indicative of what would be expected of a student who uses the Irish language as a normal means of communication in a non-educational environment, taking into account the age and any special educational needs of the student concerned’.

The revised approach ensures that all children with such fluency must be treated equally and where a priority is given by a school to children who have fluency, such a priority must be applied fairly and in an inclusive manner, regardless of background or family circumstances, including whether or not the child is in foster care.

Education and Training Provision

95. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps that have been taken to ensure that there are enough skilled workers to cater for the infrastructure projects required for the projected increase in population, particularly in the construction of houses and schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22630/18]

107. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he will take to increase the number of apprenticeships in view of the recovering economy and increasing demand for qualified trades. [26522/18]

188. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to ensure the demand for construction workers is met by 2020 to cater for increased construction output in house and infrastructure development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22755/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 95, 107 and 188 together.

Securing skills supply from the education and training to the construction sector is a major focus of my Department as part of broader Government actions to increase housing supply and roll out the National Development Plan and the National Planning Framework.

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

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

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

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

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

- Form worker
- Steel-fixer
- Curtain waller

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

Schools Building Contractors

96. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if guarantees will be sought from the remaining partners of an organisation (details supplied) that it will pay subcontractors for work already carried out on the schools bundle 5 PPP project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29370/18]

100. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has met unpaid subcontractors involved in constructing the schools bundle 5 PPP project; his plans to ensure they are paid for the work they have carried out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29369/18]

131. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the NDFA or his Department has an estimation of the number of subcontractors owed money for works carried out on the schools bundle 5 PPP project following the collapse of companies (details supplied); if there is an overall estimation of all outstanding moneys owed to these subcontractors; if the NDFA will engage with these subcontractors for work carried out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29106/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 96, 100 and 131 together.

The Schools Bundle 5 Public Private Partnership (PPP) programme comprises five school buildings and one further education college across four sites in Bray, Wexford, Carlow and Kells. This programme has been affected by the liquidations referred to by the Deputy. It is recognised that these liquidations came as a particular blow to their employees and sub-contractors.

Like other major construction projects, school building projects involve a complex arrangement of contractual relationships between the client, the main contractor and various sub-contractors and suppliers. In general, all sub-contractors and suppliers engaged on education sector building projects are employed directly by the main contractor, or indirectly by the main contractor through other sub-contractors. The Department of Education and Skills does not have visibility of the detail of the relationship between the companies referred to by the Deputy and its sub-contractors. Additionally, as the Department is not party to these contractual arrangements and does not have any role or authority in relation to payment or other contractual issues arising, we do not propose to meet with the sub-contractors involved.

The Deputy will be aware that arrangements are being put in place for the appointment of a replacement contractor, Woodvale to, inter alia, facilitate the completion of three of the schools in the programme by the end of August. While it will be a matter for Woodvale to determine its supply chain and the sub-contractors who will form part of that chain, it is likely that Woodvale will make enquiries of the existing supply chain in its assessment.

Schools Building Projects Status

97. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the degree to which a satisfactory conclusion in terms of the continuation of the school building project at a campus (details supplied) which has been interrupted by the liquidation of the building company will be made; if alternative arrangements will be put in place with a view to completion of the project in line with the timescale set out in the original projection or as close as possible thereto; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29372/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Once the company for the project to which the Deputy refers went into liquidation, steps were immediately taken by the client, which is the local Education and Training Board (ETB), and its Design Team to get the project back on track.

These include:

- The development of a critical time path to carry out all of the necessary design and re-tendering procedures in the shortest timeframe possible
- The overlapping of procedures where possible to limit delivery time
- The commencement of the pre-qualification process for a new contractor to finish out the buildings
- The implementation of arrangements to finish out the existing precast concrete work and the steel work on the roofs to enable the handover of a neat package to a new contractor

Given the substantial amount of work to be done, unfortunately it will not be possible to complete the buildings in line with the former due delivery date. It is expected that the necessary preparatory work will be completed to enable the project to be tendered later this year with a new contractor on site in March 2019 and a completion date of June 2020. The accommodation needs of the schools will be met in the intervening period.

School Staff

98. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has established a scheme in respect of the shortage of substitute teachers; if he has considered the appointment on a part-time basis of previously retired staff in areas of significant staff shortage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29296/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In the last two years we have hired 5,000 additional new teachers. It is the case that many teachers who would have been available to carry out substitute work are now gaining permanent and long term contracts.

I am aware of reports that some schools are experiencing difficulties in finding substitute teachers. In the last school year I suspended the limits that teachers on career break can work as substitutes. Schools were also reminded that, in considering career break applications, the needs of pupils should take precedence and they must take account of the availability of appropriate qualified replacement teachers.

It is already the case that retired teachers can be employed by schools. My Department informs all teachers retiring that in order to remain eligible for employment in a State funded teaching post for more than five consecutive days, a teacher must maintain his/her Teaching Council registration. The Teaching Council also reminds teachers, where a teacher indicates that he or she is considering leaving the register, that if they wish to continue to work as a teacher following retirement they should maintain registration.

I recently established the Teacher Supply Steering Group, which is chaired by the Secretary General of my Department. The Steering Group is considering the issues that impact on teacher supply, including: initial teacher education policy, provision, funding and support; data/research requirements; policies and arrangements for schools and teachers that impact on teacher mobility/supply; and promotion of the teaching profession. The Group will oversee a programme of actions according to strict timelines and clear deliverables. In undertaking its task, the Group is cognisant of the requirement that all persons wishing to teach in recognised schools must meet the professional registration standards and criteria set by the Teaching Council, which is the professional regulatory body for the teaching profession. The Steering Group last met on 29 June and I hope to be in a position to announce further measures in this area over coming months.

Psychological Assessments

99. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the measures he plans to implement to eliminate delays in children accessing necessary assessments by psychologists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29361/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can inform the Deputy that my Department introduced a new model to support pupils with special educational needs in our schools following a pilot which demonstrated strong support from principals, teachers and parents. The new model differs significantly from the old Resource Allocation Model, as schools are now front-loaded with additional resources based on the profile of each individual school. This means that the Department has allocated special education teaching support directly to schools to enable them to respond to pupil needs without having to wait for an assessment to allow them to apply for additional resources. School can now respond to individual need in a flexible way and pupils do not have to have a psychological assessment or a diagnosis of a disability in order to access Special Education Teaching. It also means that those with highest level of need can access the highest level of support within the school. Medical or psychological assessments will still be used to assess a child's needs, or the nature of difficulties they may have. However, an assessment, or diagnosis, will no longer be needed to access additional teaching support in schools.

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

I can also inform the Deputy that following on from an increase allowed in the 2017 Budget that the sanctioned number for NEPS psychologist stands at 184 whole-time equivalents of which some 179 w.t.e. posts are currently filled leaving 5 posts vacant due to on-going retirements and resignations, etc. within the Service. Even at this current level this represents the highest number of psychologists to be employed within NEPS since the inception of the service in 2000.

Additionally the Deputy may be aware that under the provisions of Budget 2018 I was pleased to announce that NEPS psychologist numbers will expand by a further 10 posts from the start of the new academic year.

A national recruitment competition is currently in operation by the Public Appointments Service in conjunction with my Department to replenish NEPS Regional Recruitment Panels to allow for both the filling of the abovementioned 5 vacancies and the expansion of NEPS number by a further 10 posts.

In common with many other psychological services and best international practice, NEPS has adopted a consultative model of service. The focus is on empowering teachers to intervene effectively with pupils whose needs range from mild to severe and transient to enduring. Psychologists use a problem solving and solution oriented consultative approach to maximize positive outcomes for these pupils. NEPS encourages schools to use a continuum based assessment and intervention process whereby each school takes responsibility for initial assessment, educational planning and remedial intervention for pupils with learning, emotional or behavioural difficulties. Teachers may consult their NEPS psychologist should they need to at this

stage in the process. Only in the event of a failure to make reasonable progress, in spite of the school's best efforts in consultation with NEPS, will the psychologist become involved with an individual child for intensive intervention or assessment.

This system allows psychologists to give early attention to urgent cases and also to help many more children indirectly than could be seen individually. It also ensures that children are not referred unnecessarily for psychological intervention. I am not aware of any particular delays in the process.

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

I hope this clarifies the issue for the Deputy.

Question No. 100 answered with Question No. 96.

School Staff

101. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he will take to assist teaching principals in primary schools who are struggling to absorb the stress and reported work overload associated with their positions; if the possibility and feasibility of allocating one administration day per week to teaching principals will be examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29129/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Recently published Circular - 40/2018 is available on the Department's website, which outlines the number of days that teaching principals may take as release time in a school year in order to assist them fulfilling their principal duties. Under these arrangements my Department pays for a substitute teacher to be employed by a school to facilitate administrative functions to be undertaken by the teaching principal.

Building on measures in previous budgets to enhance school leadership, Budget 2018 made €0.4 million available to fund almost 4600 additional release days for teaching principals in primary schools. This additional funding will see an increase in the number of release days available to teaching principals in the 2018/19 school year to 17, 23 or 29 days depending on the size of the school.

Budget 2017 allowed for the commencement of restoration of middle management posts as part of an agreed distributed leadership model and meant lifting the rigidity of the longstanding moratorium on these posts at primary and post-primary levels. This recognises the key role school leadership has in promoting a school environment which is welcoming, inclusive and accountable.

€2.75m was allocated in Budget 2017 to restore middle management positions i.e. the equivalent of approximately 1,300 middle management posts (Assistant Principal I and Assistant Principal II) at both Primary and Post-Primary. (2,600 in total)

Circular 63/2017 was issued by my Department in September 2017 which sets out a leadership and management framework for posts in recognised primary schools. Flexibility in identifying and prioritising the evolving leadership and management needs of the school, and in assigning and re-assigning post holders to specific roles and responsibilities to meet the evolving

needs of a school, is an essential feature of this school leadership model.

While the Principal is ultimately responsible to the Board of Management for the management and leadership of the school, the Deputy Principal occupies a position of vital importance within the senior leadership team in each school. The Deputy Principal co-operates with the Principal in the fulfilment of the Principal's role and acts or deputises as the Principal in the Principal's absence.

In relation to the duties assigned to Assistant Principal posts, the Principal following consultation with staff, agree the schedule of duties as best meet the needs of the school. These duties are designed to reduce the workload of the Principal.

The selection and recruitment process is well under way in most of our primary schools and the majority of these new middle management posts will be filled in the current school year, including schools where the Principal is a "Teaching Principal".

I recently announced an extension to the arrangements for schools with teaching principals to cluster their release days into full-time posts, with one teacher covering the release days of all the schools in the cluster. Up to 50 principal release cluster posts will be put in place for the 2018/19 school year. This measure will assist teaching principals to more effectively plan their release days for the benefit of the school.

The Teacher Allocation section of my Department are currently processing these applications and schools are being notified as the cluster posts are approved.

Enabling teaching principals to have one release days per week would cost approximately €12 million per annum. Any additional increase in the number of release days will be considered as part of the next annual budgetary process alongside the many other demands from the education sector.

School Accommodation

102. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the provision of additional classrooms and ancillary facilities at a college (details supplied). [29439/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): A building project for the school to which the Deputy refers has recently been approved. The intention is to devolve the delivery of the project to an external agency. Contact will be made directly with the school authority when the appropriate arrangements have been made in this regard.

School Staff

103. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an increase in the administration days for teaching principals to one release day per week will be allocated to deal with the administrative demands of the job in view of the fact that the role of the teaching principal has not been reviewed, qualified or quantified since a circular in 1973; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28857/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Recently published Circular - 40/2018 is available on the Department's website, which outlines the number of days that teaching principals may take as release time in a school year in order to assist them fulfilling

their principal duties. Under these arrangements my Department pays for a substitute teacher to be employed by a school to facilitate administrative functions to be undertaken by the teaching principal.

Building on measures in previous budgets to enhance school leadership, Budget 2018 made €0.4 million available to fund almost 4600 additional release days for teaching principals in primary schools. This additional funding will see an increase in the number of release days available to teaching principals in the 2018/19 school year to 17, 23 or 29 days depending on the size of the school.

Budget 2017 allowed for the commencement of restoration of middle management posts as part of an agreed distributed leadership model and meant lifting the rigidity of the longstanding moratorium on these posts at primary and post-primary levels. This recognises the key role school leadership has in promoting a school environment which is welcoming, inclusive and accountable.

€2.75m was allocated in Budget 2017 to restore middle management positions i.e. the equivalent of approximately 1,300 middle management posts (Assistant Principal I and Assistant Principal II) at both Primary and Post-Primary. (2,600 in total)

Circular 63/2017 was issued by my Department in September 2017 which sets out a leadership and management framework for posts in recognised primary schools. Flexibility in identifying and prioritising the evolving leadership and management needs of the school, and in assigning and re-assigning post holders to specific roles and responsibilities to meet the evolving needs of a school, is an essential feature of this school leadership model.

The Education Act 1998 and 2012, as amended, sets out the functions of school principals. While the Principal is ultimately responsible to the Board of Management for the management and leadership of the school, the Deputy Principal also occupies a position of vital importance within the senior leadership team in each school. The Deputy Principal co-operates with the Principal in the fulfilment of the Principal's role and acts or deputises as the Principal in the Principal's absence.

In relation to the duties assigned to Assistant Principal posts, the Principal following consultation with staff, agree the schedule of duties as best meet the needs of the school. These duties are designed to reduce the workload of the Principal.

The selection and recruitment process is well under way in most of our primary schools and the majority of these new middle management posts will be filled in the current school year, including schools where the Principal is a "Teaching Principal".

I recently announced an extension to the arrangements for schools with teaching principals to cluster their release days into full-time posts, with one teacher covering the release days of all the schools in the cluster. Up to 50 principal release cluster posts will be put in place for the 2018/19 school year. This measure will assist teaching principals to more effectively plan their release days for the benefit of the school.

The Teacher Allocation section of my Department are currently processing these applications and schools are being notified as the cluster posts are approved.

Enabling teaching principals to have one release days per week would cost approximately €12 million per annum. Any additional increase in the number of release days will be considered as part of the next annual budgetary process alongside the many other demands from the education sector.

School Accommodation

104. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the proposed extension and upgrade of a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29224/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): A project for the school to which the Deputy refers has recently been approved which will increase the capacity of the school to 900 pupils. The intention is to devolve the delivery of the project to an external agency. Contact will be made directly with the school authority when the appropriate arrangements have been made in this regard.

Junior Cycle Reform

105. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if consideration has been given to a provision by which students would be able to complete junior cycle music with an approved tutor external to the school setting in view of the fact that it is not a subject offered in all schools. [29367/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Framework for Junior Cycle presents a dual approach to assessment that supports student learning over the three years of junior cycle and also measures achievement at the end of those three years. This dual approach reduces the focus on one externally assessed examination as a means of assessing students and increases the prominence given to classroom-based assessment and formative assessment, providing a more rounded assessment of the education of each young person. This change of emphasis arises from an acknowledgement that students learn best when teachers provide feedback that helps students to understand how their learning can be improved. As part of the phasing in of the new Framework for Junior Cycle the new Junior Cycle music specification will be introduced to schools from September 2018.

The Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA) is a school-based award issued by schools which draws upon and reports on achievement across all elements of assessment, including ongoing, formative assessment and Classroom-Based Assessments by teachers, as well as State Examinations marked by the State Examinations Commission. The assessment of a number of practical subjects including music for the purposes of the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA) will comprise two Classroom-Based Assessments undertaken in recognised schools, a practical examination and a written examination.

Where students take extra subjects outside of their school setting these subjects cannot satisfy the requirements for ongoing formative assessment and classroom based assessments by recognised schools and cannot, therefore, be included as part of the JCPA. Students who wish to study additional subjects, such as music, outside of their school have a number of other certification avenues open to them.

Special Education Review

106. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a full consultation with a union (details supplied) will be conducted before implementing the recommendations contained in the NCSE special needs assistant review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29222/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy will be aware, in September 2016 I requested the NCSE to lead the Comprehensive Review of the Special Needs Assistant Scheme. The Review set out to ensure that the Scheme is achieving the best outcomes possible for children with special educational needs.

The Review which was published by the NCSE on the 30th of May this year identifies and recommends how, in the future, the additional care needs of students, over and above those needs that could be reasonably be expected to be managed by teaching staff, should be met.

In undertaking the Review the NCSE consulted widely to seek the views of the many stakeholders involved. These included parents, students, SNAs, teacher representatives, SNA representatives, school management, advocacy groups, principals, HSE professionals, Department of Education and Skills officials and other relevant Government departments. I understand that the union to which you refer was afforded two opportunities to contribute during the consultation stage of the review process. All of the views expressed were considered as part of the Review and informed the subsequent recommendations.

My Department is developing proposals to implement the recommendations of the Review. This will involve further substantial engagement with key Department and agencies as well as consultation with all relevant stakeholders.

Question No. 107 answered with Question No. 95.

Student Unions

108. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the engagement his departmental officials have had with an organisation (details supplied) in the past 12 months; his plans to meet the organisation before the new academic year in September 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29294/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Officials from the Department of Education and Skills engage with The Union of Students Ireland (USI) on an ongoing basis through USI representation on relevant steering committees and working groups, for example the Inter Departmental Group on Student Accommodation.

Under the National Student Accommodation Strategy (NSAS), the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government are working with the USI to support the #HomesforStudy campaign which promotes the provision of ‘digs’ accommodation for students as an alternative to both purpose built student accommodation and the general rental market, and have provided funding to the USI for this purpose. A meeting was held between USI and DES on 22 May 2018 to discuss the NSAS. The 2018 #HomesforStudy campaign was launched on 25 June.

Department officials met with USI on 1 June 2018 to discuss key matters arising from the USI paper “A national approach to the student voice”. This meeting explored key issues of concern to USI in the context of the passage of the Technological Universities Bill, 2015 through the Houses of the Oireachtas.

The Deputy may also wish to note that the Minister of State for Higher Education met with the USI on the following dates:

- 28 July 2017 to discuss matters surrounding the TU Bill, Student Accommodation and general issues and concerns;

4 July 2018

- 4 October 2017 following a USI march/rally in the city centre for publicly funded third level education;

- 14 November 2017 in relation to the National Student Charter.

I understand that the Minister for State was due to meet with the USI at the end of June, however this was postponed due to competing demands on the Minister of State's diary.

This meeting will be rescheduled in the near future.

Schools Site Acquisitions

109. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of acquiring a site for a school (details supplied) and the development of a new school building on such a site which was announced in 2015. [29440/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, the project to which he refers was announced as part of my Department's Six Year Capital Programme in 2015.

Officials in my Department have worked closely with officials from Meath County Council under the Memorandum of Understanding in relation to the identification and acquisition of a suitable permanent location for the school in question. A preferred site has been identified and the relevant Education and Training Board is currently engaging with the landowner with a view to advancing the proposed acquisition.

Once the site is secured the project to deliver permanent accommodation for the school can be advanced towards the Architectural Planning stage.

I can assure the Deputy that all parties are working to progress matters as expeditiously as possible.

Legislative Measures

110. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the progression to Committee Stage of the Provision of Objective Sex Education Bill 2018 will be discussed at Cabinet (details supplied). [29330/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In April of this year, I announced a major review of the Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) curriculum and this review is underway by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. The review will cover both the content of the RSE curriculum and support materials, as well as the delivery of the curriculum to students. Discussions at Cabinet are confidential as provided for in the Constitution.

Apprenticeship Programmes

111. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will report on his Department's fulfilment of the targets set out in the Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship in Ireland 2016-2020; his views on whether all targets set out in the plan will be met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22629/18]

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

The Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship in Ireland 2016-2020 sets out a series of detailed actions and annual targets on how the expansion commitments in the area set out in the Action Plan for Education will be met. Over the lifetime of the plan we will see 50,000 learners register on apprenticeship and traineeship programmes. This represents a more than doubling of activity by 2020. The achievement of this target will require commitment from a number of key stakeholders and is dependent on strong employer demand and economic capacity.

This Government is committed to expanding the apprenticeship model into new sectors of the economy. Arising from our first call for apprenticeship proposals in 2015 eleven new apprenticeships have been developed in a wide range of sectors, including financial services, engineering, ICT and accounting. Further new apprenticeships will get underway later in 2018.

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

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

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

I am confident that we will deliver on our targets and that learners, employers and our economy will benefit as a result.

University Global Rankings

112. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the decline in Irish universities' ratings in international rankings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29339/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): At the outset it is important to note that there is a diversity of ranking systems under which universities are assessed on the basis of a number of different models. The most recent world rankings published by QS are one of a suite of ranking models which are published annually which also include the Times Higher Education and U-Multirank. In addition, QS itself has eight sets of rankings including 'Top 50 under 50' and 'Graduate Employability Rankings'.

The Deputy may wish to note that the most recent rankings again reflected a strong performance overall by Ireland's Higher Education system. In the 2019 QS World University Rankings Ireland sees two of its eight top institutions featuring in the top 200, or top 1%, of some 15,000 universities worldwide. All seven universities and Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) feature in the top 800 worldwide.

Caution is appropriate in interpreting the results of international league tables of universities in light of the significant methodological issues in terms of how the rankings are compiled. In the case of the most recent QS international rankings these include that they:-

- do not measure the quality of teaching or the quality of learning;
- do not take into account how universities support access or tackle educational disadvantage - a key national objective;
- rely on global surveys of academics and employers who may have had no interaction with the institution in question; and
- measure the impact of research by the number of times a paper is cited and do not factor in the quality of the journal in which the research appears.

In conclusion, it is clear that international rankings can impact – both positively and negatively – on international perceptions of our national university system. It is important, therefore, that we develop a deeper understanding of the key drivers of Ireland’s rankings in order to be able to explain better the factors driving performance, highlighting where the approach could be improved. In that regard, my Department is currently evaluating the trends emerging from the separate models and will feed the results of this work through the general mechanisms for ensuring quality across the Higher Education system.

Springboard Programme

113. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 641 of 16 January 2018, the further plans that will be in place for Springboard in September 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [22638/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Springboard+ 2018, which was launched in May, will provide for over 8,000 places on 245 higher education courses. Courses will be delivered in public and private educational institutions throughout Ireland in the following skills areas: ICT, Engineering, Manufacturing, Construction, Hospitality, Business, Administration, Law, Entrepreneurship, Animation, Medical Devices Decontamination and certain other manufacturing related services courses. There are 12 courses being offered in the area of Construction, offering over 300 places.

Springboard+ courses are at Level 6 (Certificate) to Level 9 (Masters) on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). Courses selected for funding are in areas of identified enterprise skills needs and were selected, following a competitive call for proposals, by an independent evaluation panel using published criteria that included value for money, flexible delivery, engagement with industry and skills relevance. All courses provide job-readiness training and most offer the opportunity for work placement, project-based learning or industry site visits where appropriate.

The Deputy may wish to note that the eligibility criteria for Springboard+ 2018 has been extended to include the following:

- Free higher education courses for unemployed people
- Free higher education courses for previously self-employed people
- Free higher education courses for those returning to work

- Free Level 6, higher education courses for those in employment

- For employed participants on courses NFQ level 7 - 9, 90% of the course fee will be funded by the Government, with participants required to contribute just 10% of the fee.

Further information on Springboard+ 2018 including entry requirements and eligibility criteria are available on the dedicated information and applications website: www.springboard-courses.ie.

Schools Establishment

114. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of plans announced in April 2018 to establish 42 new schools over the next four years (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29341/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy will be aware, the Government recently announced plans for the establishment of 42 new schools over the next four years (2019 to 2022), including a new 600 pupil post-primary school to be established in 2019 to serve the Drogheda and Laytown school planning areas as a regional solution. This announcement follows nationwide, demographic exercises carried out by my Department into the future need for primary and post-primary schools across the country and the 4-year horizon will enable increased lead-in times for planning and delivery of the necessary infrastructure.

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

An Online Patronage Process System (OPPS) has been developed by my Department to provide objective information to all parents which will allow them to make an informed choice about their preferred model of patronage for their child's education. Parental preferences were previously collected based on direct engagement with patron bodies. The Online Patronage Process System (OPPS) website is currently live for the post-primary schools to be established in 2019.

All new schools established since 2011 to meet demographic demand are required to prioritise enrolments from the designated school planning area(s) which the school was established to serve. Therefore, only parents of eligible children residing in the relevant school planning area(s) can express a preference with regard to the patronage of the new school. This does not preclude schools from enrolling pupils from outside of the designated school planning area, rather it reflects the need to accommodate in the first instance the demographic for which the school was established.

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

An initial phased start-up is envisaged for the new schools, which typically involves the use of interim accommodation. However, this is the first time the requirement for new schools is

set out over a 4-year horizon and this will provide a better lead-in period for the planning and delivery of permanent accommodation solutions.

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

Teachers' Remuneration

115. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to achieve full pay equality for all teaching grades; the timeframe for achieving same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29417/18]

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

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

Section 11 of the Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017 provides that “the Minister [for Public Expenditure and Reform] shall, within three months of the passing of this Act, prepare and lay before the Oireachtas a report on the cost of and a plan in dealing with pay equalisation for new entrants to the public service.”

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

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

The Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform's report will inform discussions among the parties to the agreement on remaining salary scale issues in accordance with the commitment in the Agreement to consider the issue of new entrants' pay. That process commenced with a first meeting on 12 October 2017. The three teacher unions attended that meeting. Further talks were held on the 27th of April with all public service unions in relation to new entrant pay. Engagement between the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the trade unions has been ongoing and meetings are currently taking place as the parties continue to work through the various aspects of this issue.

State Examinations

116. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the action being taken to avoid non-teachers being hired to correct State examinations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29338/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The State Examinations Commission is statutorily responsible for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations.

I have been advised by the Commission, which is the independent body in place to operate and deliver the Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations, that it has an absolute responsibility to examination candidates to ensure that their work is marked to the highest standards of quality and integrity.

The SEC appoints approximately 3,600 examiners each year to mark the Leaving and Junior Certificate written examinations. The first and most essential requirement for examiners is subject competence. The SEC has a strict policy when it comes to the recruitment of examiners which requires that personnel appointed to mark the state examinations are appropriately qualified. This is non-negotiable.

When appointing examiners, the Commission advises that:

- Examiners appointed by it are selected on the basis of their academic qualifications, their teaching experience and their examining experience.

- All examiners are appropriately qualified for the work.

- Most of them are experienced serving and retired teachers.

- A large number of experienced examiners are reappointed each year

- When making new appointments, priority is given to teachers

- All appointments are overseen by the Chief Examiner

The procedures and criteria used for the appointment of examiners in 2018 are the same as in previous years. This year, as in every year, the SEC has prioritised qualified teachers to correct the exams but every year there are a small portion of examiners who are qualified in the subject area they are correcting but who are not qualified teachers. In 2017, a very small proportion (20 or 1.9% of all Junior Cycle examiners and 2 or 0.1% of all Leaving Certificate Examiners) held a qualification in the relevant subject but did not have a teaching qualification. The 2018 figures are still being finalised but the SEC do not have any reason to believe that the figures are substantially much different on previous years. However, it is important to emphasise that all examiners go through rigorous training and instruction and their work is monitored by an experienced and senior member of the examining team who samples their work on an ongoing basis throughout the marking process. The Commission takes corrective action in any case where an examiner's work falls below the required standard. These measures are designed to ensure the fair, accurate and consistent marking of every candidate's work, as is the case every year.

On the broader issue of teacher supply, which also impacts of the availability of teachers to mark the State examinations, I announced a series of actions to address these issues, including:

- Lifting the restrictions for those teachers currently on career break, in order to deal with short term substitution problems;

- Emphasising to schools that under the career break scheme, a career break can only be granted where the school will be in a position to fill the vacancy;

- Universities have increased the capacity on undergraduate initial teacher education programmes by an estimated 280 places for September 2018;

- At postgraduate level, the Universities have increased the capacity on PME programmes by more than 100 places in the priority areas of STEM, Irish and foreign languages.

I have also established a Teacher Supply Steering Group chaired by the Secretary General of my Department which includes the HEA, Teaching Council, nominees of the higher education sector and the school management bodies. The Steering Group will lead on the identification of the issues, the development of a programme of actions on teacher supply and oversee its implementation.

School Accommodation

117. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application for additional school accommodation by a school (details supplied); and his views on whether the existing buildings are unsuitable for modern primary school education. [29236/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that a project to provide four new classrooms has been approved for the school to which he refers under my Department's Additional Accommodation Scheme. The project has been devolved for delivery to the school authority for advancement.

Question No. 118 answered with Question No. 92

Schools Building Projects Status

119. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 96 of 31 May 2018, the number of times contact has been made with a school (details supplied) to date in 2018; the details of the correspondence or discussions with the school to resolve the outstanding issues relating to the provision of a new building for the school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28854/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, projects for the schools referred to are included in my Department's 6 year Capital Programme.

In light of site issues arising my Department is in contact with the Patron for the schools in question. It is understood that the Patron met with the Local Authority to discuss the site issues arising on 30th April last. In this regard, clarification was sought from the Patron, and a response is awaited by my Department in respect of its most recent written communication in the matter issued towards the end of May.

Schools Site Acquisitions

120. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the progress with securing a site for the three school campus in Buncrana, County Donegal; if a site has been purchased; the timeline for works to be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28852/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware the

project in respect of the education campus in Buncrana is included on my Department's capital programme.

My Department is working closely with Donegal County Council in relation to the proposed site acquisition. Unfortunately, the site acquisition process to date has been protracted due to technical challenges with identified site options and difficulties in reaching agreement with landowners.

A number of options are available to progress the site acquisition process, and a significant amount of work has been undertaken by both Council and Department officials in order to thoroughly appraise these in order to ensure Value for Money for the State. In the context of the identified options for progression, negotiations commenced with a landowner in respect of the preferred site option with a view to reaching agreement on mutually acceptable terms. These negotiations are currently underway and appear to be making progress.

Once the site acquisition is complete the project can progress to architectural planning stage.

Education Policy

121. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the need to accelerate the separation of church and State in the area of education and in particular to ensure that no particular religious ethos compromises the objectivity of education in schools was recognised following the referendum to repeal the eighth amendment of the Constitution; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29390/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The patron body of a school determines the ethos or characteristic spirit of the school, in accordance with Section 15 of the Education Act 1998, which provides that a board of management shall uphold, and be accountable to the patron for so upholding, the characteristic spirit of the school as determined by the cultural, educational, moral, religious, social, linguistic and spiritual values and traditions which inform and are characteristic of the objectives and conduct of the school.

Schools are required to teach all aspects of the curriculum. Elements of the curriculum cannot be omitted on the grounds of school ethos; however all aspects of the curriculum can be taught within the ethos and value system of the school. The Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2016 seeks to introduce a new requirement for a school to set out the characteristic spirit and general objectives of the school in their admission policy.

The Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector was established to look at how schools can cater for diversity and ensure an inclusive and respectful environment for all their pupils. The Report of the Advisory Group to the Forum made a series of recommendations dealing with the creation of more inclusive schools.

The Forum also recommended that the Rules for National Schools, published in 1965, be reviewed and updated, beginning with the deletion of Rule 68. Rule 68, which stated that religious instruction was the most important part of the curriculum and that a religious spirit should "inform and vivify the whole work of the school", was rescinded in January 2016. Its removal is designed to ensure that the basis on which schools operate is in keeping with the diverse and welcoming nature of our modern school system.

As the Deputy will be aware, I have announced new plans aimed at accelerating the provision of multi-denominational and non-denominational schools across the country, in line with the choices of parents, families and school communities and the Programme for Government

commitment to reach 400 such schools by 2030.

Additionally, Community National Schools were introduced in 2008 in response to the increasing demand for parental choice in the patronage of primary schools. The schools are multi-denominational and aim to accommodate parents who wish to have their children learn about different faiths and beliefs. The schools do not prioritise any particular religion or belief.

Special Educational Needs

122. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has had discussions with the Minister for Health about delays in assessments of need for children resulting in delayed supports being put in place at primary school level for some pupils; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29360/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can inform the Deputy that in 2017, I introduced a new model for the allocation of Special Education Teachers to schools. The new model replaced an older model, under which most of these resources were allocated in respect of individual children who had been diagnosed with a disability.

In its 2014 policy advice, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) had recommended that it was no longer appropriate to require individual assessments or diagnoses in order that children could receive additional teaching support. The NCSE advised that the new model would ensure, in future, that children who need support can have that support provided immediately rather than having to wait for a diagnosis.

In May of this year, the NCSE published its report of its comprehensive review of the Special Needs Assistant scheme. In its advice the NCSE recommends a new model for the allocation of SNA and other supports. This new model would remove the need for an assessment of needs in order that a child could access SNA support. A cross departmental working group has been established to develop a plan for the full implementation of the NCSEs recommendations.

It remains the case that an assessment of need is required to support applications to my department for assistive technology and special school transport. It is also the case that assessment of needs continues to be an important means of identifying the most appropriate school placement options for children whose particular needs may require a specialised setting such as a special school or special class.

Changes to the Assessment of Needs process, which were recently announced, remain a matter for the Department of Health and will be the subject of consultation between that Department and officials from the my own Department.

Schools Building Contractors

123. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of subcontracting companies that have incurred losses as a result of the liquidation of a company (details supplied); and if plans are in place to utilise these companies in the retendering of the schools bundle 5 PPP contract. [29113/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Schools Bundle 5 Public Private Partnership (PPP) programme comprises five school buildings and one further education college across four sites in Bray, Wexford, Carlow and Kells. This programme has been affected by the liquidation referred to by the Deputy.

Like other major construction projects, school building projects involve a complex arrangement of contractual relationships between the client, the main contractor and various sub-contractors and suppliers. In general, all sub-contractors and suppliers engaged on education sector building projects are employed directly by the main contractor, or indirectly by the main contractor through other sub-contractors.

It is recognised that the liquidation in question came as a particular blow to its employees and sub-contractors. However, the Department is not party to these contractual arrangements and does not have any role or authority in relation to payment or other contractual issues arising.

However, the Deputy will be aware that last week I welcomed an announcement from DIF and the project lenders, on behalf of the PPP operator, Inspiredspaces. This announcement was in respect of arrangements that are being put in place for the appointment of a replacement contractor, Woodvale, to facilitate the completion of the three most advanced schools by the end of August and to undertake survey and preliminary work at the other three buildings in the programme. This preparatory work is intended to facilitate the remaining construction work being completed by the end of December. In this respect, and while it will be a matter for Woodvale to determine its supply chain and the sub-contractors who will form part of that chain, it is likely that Woodvale will make enquiries of the existing supply chain in its assessment.

Schools Building Projects Status

124. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the school redevelopment project at a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29407/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school referred to by the Deputy is included in my Department's 6 Year Construction Programme.

My Department is currently in the process of finalising the long term projected enrolment for the school with a view to developing the project brief. My Department expects to be in contact with the school's Patron on the matter shortly.

Third Level Charges

125. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to reduce or abolish the student contribution for third level students; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29386/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The student contribution was introduced in higher education institutions with effect from the 2011/12 academic year and replaced the Student Services Charge. The Student Contribution currently stands at €3,000. There has been no increase in the student contribution since the 2015/16 academic year.

Measures are in place to assist students and their parents with meeting the cost of the student contribution.

In 2016/17 approximately 43% of all fulltime undergraduate students had all or part of the student contribution paid for by the State on their behalf through the student grant scheme.

In addition, in recognition of the financial pressures that the student contribution may place

on families, my Department and the HEA have requested higher education institutions to put in place arrangements under which a student may opt to pay the student contribution in two instalments in a given academic year.

The cost of abolishing the student contribution would be approximately €220m for the 2018/19 academic year would be approximately €220m. This figure takes into account the resulting reduction to my Department's Student Grant Scheme budget.

I am committed to providing a more sustainable funding model for higher education. As committed to in the programme for government I referred the Cassells report to the Joint Oireachtas committee on Education for consideration of the recommendations. The committee has recently requested my Department to undertake a full economic evaluation of the recommendations which I have agreed to. Following this evaluation I look forward to receiving the Committee's recommendations which will assist in facilitating informed decision-making for the future direction of policy and funding for higher education.

In the interim, I have been working to secure additional funding for higher education. This commitment is reflected in Budget 2017 and 2018 announcements in which the higher education sector was prioritised. In total, we will be investing more than €100m in higher education in 2018 than in 2016. We will look to continue this commitment to investment in higher education in 2019 and beyond.

This additional funding will allow for targeted initiatives in higher education including skills programmes, performance and innovation funding, technological university development and apprenticeship costs in the sector. It will also allow for places to be provided for 2,100 additional students in 2018.

Capitation Grants

126. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the programme for partnership Government commitments on increasing capitation will be honoured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29340/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Programme for a Partnership Government committed to investing an extra €500m in education by 2021 through various measures including annual increases in primary and secondary capitation rates.

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

I recognise the need to improve capitation funding for schools having regard to the reductions that were necessary over recent years. Restoring capitation funding as resources permit is one of the actions included in the Action Plan for Education and I remain committed to achieving this. However, I must be prudent in the context of ongoing budgetary pressures and prioritise where it is not possible to do everything that I would like to do in the education sector in any one year. As the Deputy knows any decision on capitation will be made as part of the annual estimates process. In the last two budgets, I made provision for 6,000 extra teachers and 3,000 extra SNAs and over 3,000 new middle management posts. These resources were allocated to improve the learning experience right across the sector, with a particular focus on children with

special needs.

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

Special Education Review

127. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the ongoing review of the NCSE is reviewing the need for permanent contracted SNA jobs in schools in the future particularly with the possibility that assessments will not be carried out by SENOs to diagnose medical conditions and needs; and his views on whether there is a need now to allocate permanent SNAs, per an agreed methodology, pupil ratio in schools. [29130/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy will be aware, in 2016 I requested the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) to lead a comprehensive review of the SNA scheme to identify and recommend how, in the future, the additional care needs of students, over and above those that could be reasonably be expected to be managed by teaching staff, should be met. The review set out to ensure that the Scheme is achieving the best outcomes possible for children with special educational needs.

The NCSE published the Review on 30 May and the Government has noted the contents of the report.

One of the recommendations in the Review is that a new frontloaded allocation model for Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support be introduced. This would ensure that SNA posts are in school and available immediately to students upon their arrival. A further recommendation is made with regard to baseline allocations for Special School and Special Classes. This new frontloaded model of allocation would also reduce, and in many cases, eliminate the need for professional assessments in order to access resources.

I wish to advise the Deputy that the NCSE Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) have no role in the diagnosis of disability.

In response to the Review, I have undertaken to develop proposals for the implementation of the NCSE's recommendations and to return to Government, following engagement with the Departments of Public Expenditure and Reform and Health, with a proposed implementation plan.

Work is underway to assess the costs associated with the implementation of any recommendations that subsequently may be approved by Government.

Work is also underway on the development of a new model for the allocation of resources to schools, as recommended by the NCSE. It is considered likely that the introduction of such a new model will need to be piloted in selected schools in order that the impact and effectiveness of a new model can be evaluated and understood before such a new model is rolled out nationally.

I expect to bring proposals for implementation of the Review's recommendations to Government in the coming months.

Schools Site Acquisitions

128. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress which has been made in securing a permanent site for the new regional second level school for the Carpenterstown and Castleknock school planning areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29297/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, the school to which she refers is included in my Department's 6 year construction programme.

Officials in my Department continue to liaise with officials in Fingal County Council in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding in relation to the identification and acquisition of a suitable location for the school in question and have identified a preferred site option within the relevant school planning areas. Negotiations with the landowner in respect of this proposed acquisition are currently ongoing.

Due to commercial sensitivities relating to site acquisitions generally, the Deputy will appreciate that I am not in a position to provide further details at this time but I can confirm that the school patron is being kept apprised of developments in respect of the site acquisition process.

Special Educational Needs Staff

129. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a school (details supplied) has lost the service of a full-time teacher due to being assessed on 2014-15 student numbers for learning support and resource allocation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28853/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): DES Circular 0013/2017 for primary schools set out the details of the new model for allocating special education teachers to schools.

The revised allocation process replaces the previous generalised allocation model combined with the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) allocation process which provided additional resource teaching supports to schools, to support pupils assessed as having Low Incidence disabilities.

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

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

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

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

In relation to the school referred to in this question, the special education teaching allocation provided for this school for 2017/18 was 115.25 hours.

The profiling model had indicated a profiled special educational need for this school of 102.5 teaching hours.

However, as no school received an allocation, on the introduction of the new model, which was less than the allocation they received in the previous 2016/17 school year, the school maintained an allocation of 115.25 hours and it was indicated that within this allocation there was a retained element of 12.75 hrs.

This allocation equates to over 4.5 full time additional Special Education Teachers. This is a very significant allocation for a school of this size, which had an enrolment of 343 pupils at the time the profiles were developed.

There has therefore been no reduction to the allocation of special education teaching support for this school and no loss of a teaching post.

Where a school profile significantly changes following the allocation process e.g. a developing school where the net enrolment numbers significantly increase year on year, additional allocations may be made.

The criteria for qualification for mainstream school developing school posts for the 2017/18 school year were set out in DES Circular 17/2017 (Primary School Staffing Schedule) and DES 10,11,12/2017 (Post Primary School Staffing Schedule).

Schools who qualified for additional mainstream developing school posts in accordance with these criteria also qualified for additional Special Education Teaching Allocations to take account of this developing status.

However, the criteria also provided that where a school has a retained allocation, any additional allocation they receive on the basis of qualification for developing posts will be a net allocation, less any retained element of their existing school profile allocation.

The school referred to in this question qualified for one developing post under the developing school criteria for the 2017/18 school year. This meant the school would have qualified for 3 hours additional SEN allocation, if the school did not have a retained element to their allocation.

However, as the school had a retained allocation of 12.75 hours, the school maintained their existing allocation.

There has been no reduction of allocation or loss of a teaching post for this school.

It is also acknowledged that there will be some schools where exceptional circumstances may arise.

The National Council for Special Education will be available to support schools where schools have developed and implemented appropriate plans for the deployment of their special education needs teaching resources, but the school considers that further support may be required. This support may involve Continuing Professional Development or further training for school staff, advice in relation to the support plans that are in place, and possibly a review process once schools can clearly demonstrate that exceptional circumstances have arisen in the school.

The NCSE has published details of how schools can seek a review of their allocations, in-

cluding the utilisation of their allocations, in circumstances where a school considers that very exceptional circumstances have arisen subsequent to the development of the profile.

Should schools consider that they fulfil the criteria for a review on the grounds of exceptional circumstances, details of this review process are available at: <http://ncse.ie/review-of-special-education-teacher-supports-where-there-are-exceptional-circumstances-or-needs-arising-in-a-school>.

I can also advise that profiles for all schools are currently being reviewed, based on updated data, with a view to making revised profiled allocations for all schools effective from September 2019.

Apprenticeship Data

130. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of registered apprentices in 2018; the target for registered apprentices in each of the years to 2021, by gender; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28780/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): The information requested by the Deputy in relation to target apprenticeship registrations in the period 2018 to 2020 is set out in the table. The Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship & Traineeship 2016-2020 sets out annual target apprenticeship registrations in the period to 2020. The Plan does not set registration targets by gender.

It should be noted that SOLAS do not currently have forecast registrations beyond 2020. I am informed by SOLAS that due to a break in the Central Statistics Office (CSO) data series and issues with the ESRI macro-economic model there has been a delay in updating of skills forecasts by the Skills and Labour Market and Research Unit (SLMRU). As soon as these issues are resolved I understand that the SLMRU will commence the occupational skills forecasting project, with subsequent publication.

2,280 new apprentices registered on apprenticeship programmes at end June 2018. It should be noted that a large number of registrations take place at the start of the academic year (i.e. September 2018).

Craft- based apprenticeships	2018	2019	2020
Forecast new registrations per annum	4,697	5,087	5,587
New apprenticeships			
Planned new registrations per annum	1,500	2,297	3,413
Total target apprenticeship registration p.a.	6,197	7,384	9,000

Question No. 131 answered with Question No. 96.

National Debt

132. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach the extent to which Ireland's total debt and current debt compare with other European countries. [29376/18]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Joe McHugh): The following table outlines the government consolidated gross debt for the 28 Member States for

2017.

General Government Gross Debt (GG Debt) is defined in the EU regulations implementing the Maastricht Treaty as the gross debt liabilities of the consolidated General Government sector, at nominal value. ‘Consolidated’ means that any money owed by one entity within General Government to another is excluded from the total GG Debt.

Also included in the table is the percentage of debt to the relevant country’s GDP.

Government consolidated gross debt, 2017

Country	€ million	% of GDP
European Union (current composition)	12,504,713	81.6
Belgium	452,170	103.1
Bulgaria	12,815	25.4
Czech Republic	68,500	34.6
Denmark	104,895	36.4
Germany	2,092,643	64.1
Estonia	2,066	9.0
Ireland	201,294	68.0
Greece	317,407	178.6
Spain	1,144,298	98.3
France	2,218,436	97.0
Croatia	38,080	78.0
Italy	2,263,056	131.8
Cyprus	18,725	97.5
Latvia	10,782	40.1
Lithuania	16,632	39.7
Luxembourg	12,709	23.0
Hungary	90,535	73.6
Malta	5,643	50.8
Netherlands	416,067	56.7
Austria	289,490	78.4
Poland	240,220	50.6
Portugal	242,620	125.7
Romania	64,565	35.0
Slovenia	31,860	73.6
Slovakia	43,227	50.9
Finland	137,286	61.4
Sweden	189,961	40.6
United Kingdom	2,013,316	87.7

National Debt

133. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach the degree to which Ireland’s total debt has fluctuated in each of the past ten years to date expressed as a percentage of GNP and GDP. [29377/18]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Joe McHugh): The fol-

following table sets out Ireland's Gross General Government Debt as a percentage of GDP, GNP and GNI*.

Modified Gross National Income (GNI*) is a new indicator (introduced in July 2017), recommended by the Economic Statistics Review Group, and is designed to exclude globalisation effects that are disproportionately impacting the measurement of the size of the Irish economy (2017 GNI* not yet available).

Ireland's Gross General Government Debt, 2007-2017

Year	% of GDP	% of GNP	% of GNI*
2007	23.9	27.9	28.0
2008	42.4	49.4	49.6
2009	61.5	74.4	75.6
2010	86.1	103.7	108.7
2011	110.3	137.3	144.5
2012	119.6	147.9	157.8
2013	119.4	141.7	150.6
2014	104.5	123.4	131.7
2015	76.9	97.9	116.6
2016	72.8	88.5	106.1
2017	68.0	83.5	not available

European Council Meetings

134. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he contributed to the discussion at the June 2018 EU Council meeting regarding immigration. [29354/18]

The Taoiseach: I attended the European Council in Brussels on 28 and 29 June. Our discussions covered Brexit; economic and monetary union; migration; security and defence; jobs, growth and competitiveness; digital and innovation; the Multiannual Financial Framework; external relations and other items. I will be reporting on the meeting to the House today, 4 July.

Migration has been a divisive issue for the EU and our discussions at the European Council were difficult and lengthy.

However we reached agreement on a number of new steps including the need to increase funding for the Africa Trust Fund; launch the next tranche of funding for the Facility for Refugees in Turkey; establish dedicated funding through the EU budget; strengthen the role of Frontex; explore the concept of regional disembarkation platforms; and the voluntary establishment of control centres within EU Member States.

This reinforces the importance of what I have described as our three-pronged approach: securing our external borders; strengthening cooperation with countries of transit and origin; and dealing with management of migrants within the EU - where a balance of solidarity and responsibility is needed.

From Ireland's perspective, I stressed the need to develop a close partnership with Africa. We have to build up institutions, improve security and provide economic opportunity there so that people can enjoy better prospects in their home countries. Because of this, we offered last week to substantially increase our commitment to the EU Trust Fund for Africa to €15 million.

The concept of regional disembarkation platforms is at a very early stage and we will take careful note of how it develops. As I said at the meeting, any such platforms would have to be managed in close cooperation with the UNHCR, the IOM and relevant third countries, and with full respect for international law and human rights standards.

Ireland is less directly affected by migration than many other Member States: however, in a spirit of solidarity, we have played a constructive role including by opting into the 2015 EU relocation and resettlement measures; sending a series of naval vessels to help with humanitarian efforts in the Mediterranean; and significantly increasing our financial contributions.

In advance of the June European Council, we offered to take in migrants from aboard the MV Lifeline. I intend that we will continue to play an active and constructive role in relation to migration.

Strategic Communications Unit

135. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if his Department has received legal correspondence from a company (details supplied) on the strategic communications unit. [29041/18]

141. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if his Department has received legal correspondence from a company (details supplied) on the strategic communications unit. [29047/18]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 135 and 141 together.

The Department did receive legal correspondence from the company mentioned. This correspondence was received during the review of the Operation of the Strategic Communications Unit (SCU) conducted in March of this year, as a result of clarification sought by my Department specifically on the facts of matters relating to the SCU and Project Ireland 2040.

Departmental Expenditure

136. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Taoiseach the annual expenditure on commercial archaeology services in his Department by provider in each of the years 2013 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28753/18]

The Taoiseach: There was no expenditure on commercial archaeology services by my Department in each of the years 2013 to date.

Departmental Staff Redeployment

137. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Taoiseach the number of staff in his Department working on the visit of Pope Francis. [28756/18]

138. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Taoiseach the overall cost to his Department for the visit of Pope Francis. [28757/18]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 137 and 138 together.

Staff from the Protocol Division in my Department are involved with a number of ele-

ments of the forthcoming visit by Pope Francis to Ireland. The Division includes the Head of Protocol (Principal Officer), 2 Assistant Principal Officers and 5 Protocol Officers (Executive grade, 2 part-time). In addition two members of staff from Government Information Services are involved in the media elements of the Visit. These staff work closely with the Protocol and Press staff at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Event Management Unit at the Office of Public Works.

There will be a minimal cost to my Department for the event which Pope Francis will attend in Dublin Castle on Saturday 25 August. The majority of costs for the visit will be borne by the Office of Public Works.

Departmental Expenditure

139. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Taoiseach the cost of operating a web page related to the visit of Pope Francis which outlines the programme of religious events. [28758/18]

The Taoiseach: The development and management of the public safety information regarding the upcoming visit of Pope Francis on *gov.ie* is managed by in-house resources and therefore no direct costs were incurred with these aspects. €1,216 was spent on the translation of these pages to the Irish language.

Electric Vehicles

140. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Taoiseach the number of charging ports and parking bays for electric vehicles at his Department building and other buildings used by his Department. [28903/18]

The Taoiseach: My Department is located in one building - Government Buildings on Merrion Street - which is managed by the Office of Public Works. There are no e-car charging ports or parking bays provided in Government Buildings. No property is owned, part-owned or under the control of my Department.

Question No. 141 answered with Question No. 135.

Strategic Communications Unit

142. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach when the staff of the strategic communications unit will be transferred. [29050/18]

The Taoiseach: Following the report into the operation of the Strategic Communications Unit (SCU) conducted in March last, it was agreed that the SCU should be wound down and that my Department would revert to a reformed GIS model, with a smaller budget and less staff. It was agreed that surplus staff would be redeployed, either within the Department of the Taoiseach or in other Departments or agencies; these decisions to be made by the management of the Department in consultation with the staff impacted. The report further provided for a transition period which was to end in July. The majority of staff transfers have now been made, with the remainder to conclude by the end of July 2018.

Exports Data

143. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Taoiseach if figures have been compiled regarding the number of goods and services exported to Europe overland through the United Kingdom but which were not used, bought or sold within the UK in 2017; the number of goods and services exported to Europe directly but not transported through the UK in 2017; the type of goods and services; the value of goods and services; and the mode of transport used, in tabular form. [29266/18]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Joe McHugh): The data requested by the Deputy is not available in CSO statistics.

The value of goods and service exports with a breakdown by country of destination is shown in the Statistical Yearbook of Ireland. The following table is from the latest edition which contains data for 2016.

For Balance of Payments and National Accounts purposes the data include conceptual adjustments for goods exports which relate to the recognition of a change of economic ownership taking place. The mode of transport used is not available.

EU Exports of Goods and Services 2016

Country	€ million
Austria	-1,045
Belgium	19,612
Bulgaria	183
Croatia	127
Cyprus	-49
Czech Republic	833
Denmark	2,716
Estonia	81
Finland	1,746
France	14,375
Germany	23,869
Greece	653
Hungary	1,812
Italy	11,465
Latvia	127
Lithuania	147
Luxembourg	-3,029
Malta	160
Netherlands	13,602
Poland	2,864
Portugal	1,835
Romania	380
Slovakia	176
Slovenia	168
Spain	8,643
United Kingdom	42,882
Total	144,333

Source: *The Statistical Yearbook of Ireland Table 16.2*

Goods Export statistics published by the CSO are compiled from a survey of exporting businesses carried out by the VIMA (VIES, Intrastat, Mutual Assistance) division of the Revenue Commissioners. The traders report in this survey the country of destination of the goods they export. Any country or countries through which the goods might pass en route to their final destination are not reported.

If goods are exported to Great Britain, and are subsequently exported again by a British trader to a third country, the CSO data will show these goods as having been exported to Great Britain.

Data on mode of transport is not available.

The following table shows Goods Exports to the EU for 2017

Table A: Goods Exports to EU by division 2017

Country	Food and live animals	Beverages and tobacco	Crude materials, inedible, except fuels	Mineral fuels, lubricants and related products	Animal and vegetable oils, fats and waxes	€m Chemicals and related products nes
Austria	21	4	10	0	0	200
Belgium	261	12	30	2	12	12,325
Bulgaria	4	9	0	0	0	48
Croatia	1	0	0	0	0	31
Cyprus	3	2	0	0	0	9
Czech Republic	41	17	1	0	0	120
Denmark	126	9	3	1	0	324
Estonia	1	1	0	0	0	5
Finland	9	3	145	0	0	74
France	786	51	255	43	1	3,046
Germany	650	65	72	1	2	5,060
Great Britain	4,002	212	398	365	14	4,889
Greece	20	4	1	0	0	284
Hungary	11	2	0	0	0	106
Italy	308	11	48	5	0	1,757
Latvia	1	41	0	0	0	18
Lithuania	3	1	0	0	0	7
Luxembourg	4	0	0	51	0	8
Malta	15	0	0	0	0	12
Netherlands	806	22	152	114	49	1,362
Northern Ireland	611	78	70	56	7	350
Poland	149	14	12	0	0	712
Portugal	32	6	38	0	1	307
Romania	11	4	4	0	0	241
Slovakia	3	2	0	0	0	20
Slovenia	1	2	36	0	0	37
Spain	235	16	34	2	0	1,810
Sweden	155	9	64	0	0	219
Unknown EU	0	0	0	0	0	0
Grand Total	8,269	599	1,374	641	87	33,382

Table A cont'd: Goods Exports to EU by division 2017

Country	Manufactured goods classified chiefly by material	Machinery and transport equipment	Miscellaneous manufactured articles	Commodities and transactions not classified elsewhere	Total€m
Austria	31	71	26	3	366
Belgium	46	223	416	10	13,337
Bulgaria	7	11	4	0	84
Croatia	1	2	1	0	37
Cyprus	0	7	2	1	25
Czech Republic	10	194	25	5	413
Denmark	12	131	33	7	646
Estonia	2	11	1	0	22
Finland	12	71	8	2	324
France	52	719	335	28	5,316
Germany	193	3,174	836	46	10,098
Great Britain	959	2,164	1,163	318	14,486
Greece	1	9	8	1	328
Hungary	6	82	78	3	289
Italy	62	249	151	14	2,605
Latvia	0	2	2	0	64
Lithuania	0	9	1	0	23
Luxembourg	1	54	1	0	120
Malta	0	2	0	1	32
Netherlands	61	444	2,888	24	5,921
Northern Ireland	261	146	190	155	1,925
Poland	21	287	123	8	1,326
Portugal	2	50	18	2	455
Romania	2	39	9	2	312
Slovakia	4	22	6	1	58
Slovenia	0	5	2	0	84
Spain	47	299	142	13	2,598
Sweden	51	183	61	5	746
Unknown EU	0	608	0	98	706
Grand Total	1,845	9,268	6,532	750	62,747

The Irish Maritime Development Office (IMDO), in conjunction with the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, has undertaken a study into the use of the UK landbridge by Irish importers and exporters. The purpose of this research is to establish the volume of traffic using the UK landbridge at present, the potential consequences that Brexit will have on landbridge usage and the various alternative options that may be viable. The Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport advise that this Study is expected to be finalised and published shortly.

Departmental Contracts Data

144. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Taoiseach the number of times his Department has engaged polling companies or Irish market researchers to conduct research on its behalf in

each of the past two years; the names of such companies; and the costs associated with same. [29581/18]

The Taoiseach: My Department engaged a market research company, Behaviour and Attitudes, on one occasion in 2017. The market research for which they were engaged has not yet been undertaken on behalf of the Department.

Military Medals

145. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence when a person (details supplied) will receive their 1916-2016 commemorative medal as a member of the Defence Forces. [29513/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I am advised by the military authorities that the individual mentioned in the Deputy's question is on a list of persons yet to receive their medal.

I am also informed that staff of the Naval Service Headquarters (NSHQ) have made efforts to contact all those retired/discharged persons who were due to receive medals. They will endeavour to contact the individual named with a view to arranging the presentation of the 1916 Commemorative medal at the earliest opportunity.

Defence Forces Personnel

146. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the reason Defence Forces Regulation A.11 paragraph 16 was altered; if he will engage with the representative organisations in contravention of paragraph 24(2) of Defence Forces Regulation S.6; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29516/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Defence Force Regulation A.11 provides for matters concerning leave in the Defence Forces. The recent amendment to Paragraph 16 increases to four working weeks from 19 days, the amount of carry over leave allowed to members of the Permanent Defence Force in circumstances where the member could not take annual leave due to being on certified sick leave, adoptive leave or maternity leave. This measure will bring procedures in such cases into line with the requirements of the Working Time Directive. The Representative Associations were given notice of the amended Regulation.

Work is underway in both the Department of Defence and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection in relation to the removal of the blanket exclusion of members of the Defence Forces from the scope of the Working Time Directive. The Department of Defence and the Defence Forces have undertaken significant work in examining the nature of the duties of the Defence Forces and how the Working Time Directive can be applied to the members of the Defence Forces.

As part of this process, my Department will engage through the Conciliation and Arbitration process with the Defence Forces Representative Associations, to discuss the application of the provisions of the Working Time Directive to the Defence Forces.

Departmental Legal Cases Data

147. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of cases settled by his Department with members of the Defence Forces who have taken court cases for infringements of the working time directive; the amount the legal fees and settlements will ultimately cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29517/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): My Department has settled one case taken by a member of the Defence Forces in relation to the carryover of her annual leave entitlements.

This case was listed for hearing in the High Court on 14 and 15 June but the matter was settled on consent of the parties to the proceedings in respect of one specific aspect of the individual's claim in so far as it related to the carryover of the plaintiff's annual leave. An Order was made by the Court in respect of limited relief that was agreed between the parties.

Proceedings have been served in a number of other cases. Given that matters are sub judice, the Deputy will appreciate that it would be inappropriate for me to comment in relation to this ongoing litigation or matters relating to legal costs.

However, I have previously informed the House that the Government Decision dated 18 November 2016 approved the drafting of the Heads of Bill to amend the Organisation of Working Time Act, 1997. This will remove the blanket exclusion of An Garda Síochána and members of the Defence Forces from its scope. This will be subject to the application of the appropriate exclusions/derogations permitted by Directive 2003/88/EC. Work is underway in both the Department of Defence and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection in relation to this decision.

Defence Forces Representative Organisations

148. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the legislative and procedural changes he plans to introduce to settle outstanding grievances with the Defence Forces representative organisations in view of the breach of the European Charter of Fundamental Human Rights (details supplied). [29518/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Members of the Defence Forces have access to a range of mechanisms for dispute resolution. They are designed to ensure that independence, confidentiality and impartiality are properly respected. Claims can be advanced on either an individual or collective basis, depending on the forum being used. The outcome arising from the use of a particular mechanism may determine the type of legislative or procedural change required. In addition, the Minister has power pursuant to Section 26 Defence Act 1954 to make Regulations.

As there here has been no finding of a breach of the EU Charter of Fundamental Human Rights, no legislative or procedural change is anticipated in reference thereto.

Defence Forces Properties

149. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he has engaged with the Department of Education and Skills with regard to the need to upgrade schools on the Curragh Camp; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29530/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): My Department is not currently engaged in formal negotiations with the Department of Education and Skills

in relation to school provision and accommodation requirements for the existing schools in the Curragh Camp. I am advised that my officials have recently had informal discussions on the range of matters to be considered in relation to the planning for school provision at post primary level in the general area. While the planning for and provision of school accommodation is primarily a matter for the Minister for Education and Skills, my Department is open to discussions with that Department in relation to the future planning provision for schools in that area.

Defence Forces Properties

150. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the status of the establishment of a new lands management team and a new environmental maintenance contract for the Curragh plains; the work ongoing to identify suitable locations for car parking spaces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29531/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The recruitment process for the appointment of a new lands management team will continue in 2018 and as part of this team a new Curragh Maor was recently appointed. This team will oversee all activities on the ground including, but not limited to, littering, sheep branding, patrolling, monitoring users of lands, inspection of property boundaries, illegal encampments and engagement with the public.

In relation to the award of a new environmental maintenance contract for the Curragh, I can advise that it is my Department's intention to commence this procurement process in the coming months.

Preliminary work has been undertaken in identifying suitable locations for the construction of car parking facilities on the Curragh plains. Further detailed work on the design and associated costings will be progressed as part of my Department's infrastructural programme.

Departmental Contracts Data

151. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of times his Department has engaged polling companies and or Irish market researchers to conduct research on its behalf in each of the past two years; the names of such companies; the costs associated with same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29571/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I can confirm that my Department has not engaged the services of any polling companies and or Irish market research companies during the period in question.

European Council Meetings

152. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the agreements made by Ireland at the EU Council meeting in respect of security and defence matters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29610/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The European Council meeting was held in Brussels on 28 June 2018 and attended by An Taoiseach. The Council conclusions adopted at this meeting covered a number topics, including migration,

security and defence, and economic and financial affairs.

In terms of security and defence, Council conclusions detailed a number of key areas including Permanent Structured Co-operation (PESCO), military mobility, civilian CSDP and EU-NATO Co-operation.

More specifically, in relation to PESCO the Council called for the fulfilment of the commitments with the further development of the initial projects and the institutional framework, and noted the future discussion regarding the conditions for third State participation in PESCO.

EU-NATO cooperation was discussed ahead of the NATO summit in July with NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg in attendance. The new Joint declaration was signalled in the Council Conclusions and there were calls for further deepening of EU-NATO Co-operation, in full respect of the principles of inclusiveness, reciprocity and the decision-making autonomy of the EU.

The Council welcomed progress on military mobility in the framework of PESCO and EU-NATO cooperation and called on Member States to simplify and standardise relevant rules by 2024. Ireland noted that these efforts will fully respect the sovereignty of the Member States.

The Council called for the swift implementation of the European Defence Industrial Development Programme (EDIDP) and for future progress on the European Defence Fund (EDF) both in its research and capability windows.

The Council also welcomed the work undertaken to strengthen civilian CSDP and called for an agreement on a civilian CSDP Compact by the end of this year. It recognised that military and civilian aspects need to be addressed in a comprehensive manner with a focus on concrete deliverables.

Finally, the Council also welcomed the Joint Communication on Europe's resilience to hybrid and Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear related threats and calls for the adoption as soon as possible of a new EU regime of restrictive measures to address the use and proliferation of chemical weapons.

European Defence Action Plan

153. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to include a dedicated budgetary heading on security and defence in the multi-annual financial framework of the EU and the budgetary implications for Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29611/18]

157. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the financial implications for Ireland arising from the EU Commission proposal of 13 June 2018 for a regulation establishing the European defence fund for the period 2021 to 2027; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29615/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 153 and 157 together.

The next EU Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF) will determine the budget spending for the EU for the period from 2021-2027. On 2 May 2018, the European Commission presented its EU budget proposals for the MFF. Included in this, the Commission proposed a budget of €13 billion, over the seven year period, be dedicated to the European Defence Fund

- €4.1 billion to defence research and €8.9 billion to the development of defence capabilities.

The 2021-2027 MFF process is at a very early stage. The allocation of resources across all of the various EU sectoral funds will be considered in the context of the eventual total agreed budget for the EU.

On 13 June 2018, the Commission put forward proposals for a Regulation establishing the European Defence Fund for the period 2021-2027 under the 2021-2027 multi-annual financial framework. It aims to trigger cooperative programmes that would not happen without an EU contribution and, by supporting research and development activities, to provide the necessary incentives to boost cooperation at each stage of the industrial cycle. Collaborative projects with significant cross-border participation by small and medium-sized enterprises will be particularly encouraged. This will ensure that the Fund remains open to recipients from all Member States, regardless of their size and location in the Union.

In addition, the Commission proposes that the Union enhance its strategic transport infrastructures to make them fit for military mobility. A dedicated budget of €6.5 billion will be earmarked in the Connecting Europe Facility.

In relation to defence spending, Government policy is defined within the parameters of our national budgetary process and role of Dáil Éireann. Within the EU, it is accepted that defence and security is a national competence, including national spending on defence and security.

Permanent Structured Co-operation

154. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if details have been given on the second wave of PESCO projects with the updated list of projects and participants to be decided by November 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29612/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): On 2 May 2018, the European Defence Agency, through the PESCO Secretariat, invited participating Member States to submit their project proposals for the next list of PESCO Projects no later than 31 of July 2018. It is expected that the submissions will be evaluated during September with the second wave of PESCO Projects to be adopted in November.

While a list has not been completed as yet in relation to the second wave of PESCO projects, work is now ongoing in my Department on analysing new PESCO project proposals put forward by Member States in terms of compatibility and suitability to Ireland's needs.

Ireland is currently participating in two projects from the first list of PESCO projects. One relates to the ongoing development of Defence Forces capabilities for peace support and crisis management operations; The German led "Centre of Excellence for EU Military Training Missions (EUTMCC) Project" and the second project is a Greek led "Upgrade of Maritime Surveillance Systems". We also maintain observer status on a further eight projects.

European Defence Capabilities

155. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the steps that have been taken by Ireland to implement priorities identified by the capability development plan and co-ordinated annual review on defence; the estimated cost of the implementation of same; the outstanding priorities identified; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[29613/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): In November 2016, the European Defence Agency (EDA) Steering Board agreed to the review of the European Union Capability Development Plan (CDP) and tasked the EDA to present a new set of Priority Actions by Spring 2018 that would reflect the changing security challenges. At the EDA Steering Board on 28 June, delegates approved the EU Capability Development Priorities. The review process has identified eleven Priorities across all domains, land, maritime, air and the joint domain which include developing capabilities in the area of Cyber, Information and Communication Systems, Naval Manoeuvrability, Air Mobility and Enhanced Logistic capabilities.

The Capability Development Priorities will now be developed further by the EDA and Member States and also in other international capability development fora. The priorities are assessed on an ongoing basis in line with Member States requirements and evolve in response to the changing security environment.

The Co-ordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD) will assist the CDP process by reviewing Member States' implementation of the 2018 EU Capability Development Priorities and by identifying additional opportunities for cooperation.

The Co-ordinated Annual Review (CARD) on Defence aims to create greater transparency by sharing Member States information on future defence policy, capability development, budgets and investment. It is expected that such transparency will support greater collaboration among Member States on investment in capabilities. Participation in CARD is open to all Member States on an entirely voluntary basis, recognising that the defence policies of Member States, including defence spending and capabilities, is entirely a national competence.

Ireland's engagement in the implementation of priorities is through our contribution in developing defence capabilities, both nationally and internationally, along with our active cooperation with the EDA in relation to CARD. A bilateral meeting as part of the CARD trial run took place between Ireland and the EDA last December along with further exchanges with the EDA during the finalisation and return of Ireland's CARD data in early 2018.

Ireland engages in the following capability development projects in the EDA. The costs listed are the lifetime costs of each individual project and are met from within the Defence Vote;

- European Centre for Manual Neutralisation Capabilities (ECMAN) at a cost of EUR 450,000,

- Co-operation on Cyber Ranges in the European Union. There is no financial contribution to this project but Member States will contribute to the project "in-kind" - through participating and exchanging information and knowledge in relation to cyber range training and exercises.

The eleven Capability Development Priorities identified will now be forwarded for endorsing by the Member States Ministers at the EDA Steering Board in November 2018. The report of the CARD trial run will also be presented. No conclusions have yet been drawn from the CARD.

European Defence Capabilities

156. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the involvement of Ireland in the European defence industrial development programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29614/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The European Defence Fund (EDF) is a financial mechanism designed to enable and accelerate cooperation among Member States to better coordinate, supplement and amplify national investments in defence. Through the co-funded EDF, Member States will be able to achieve greater output and develop defence technology and equipment that may not be feasible on their own, by pooling national resources. The fund will also foster innovation and allow economies of scale, which will enhance the competitiveness of the EU defence industry. The Fund has two strands or windows, which are complementary; the Research Window and the Capability Window.

The European Defence Industrial Development Programme (EDIDP) is known as the Capability Window. The programme aims to support the competitiveness and innovation capacity of the Union's defence industry for the period 2019-2020. In addition, the programme will act as an enabler for cooperation, incentivising potential collaborative development programmes.

Ireland's position in the European Defence industrial Development Programme was developed through the Department of Defence led Interdepartmental Group made up of representatives from the Departments of the Taoiseach, Foreign Affairs and Trade, Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Business, Enterprise and Innovation. National engagement with those Departments took place on the formulation of the text of the regulation to establish this programme, in order to ensure that the Programme reflected the interests of Ireland, particularly in the area of opportunities for SMEs. Ireland strongly welcomes proposals that a proportion of the overall budget is to be earmarked for projects involving cross-border participation of SMEs.

The text of the regulation was negotiated between Member States in the Friends of the Presidency format and following agreement between the Council and the Parliament the EDIDP will commence on 1 January 2019 for a duration of two years and receive funding of €500 million until end-2020. In the next Multi-annual Financial Framework the proposal from the Commission is to provide €8.9 billion in funding to a follow-on capability development programme.

Question No. 157 answered with Question No. 153.

European Defence Action Plan

158. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the proposals to increase the mobility of military personnel, material and equipment at EU level as discussed at the recent European Council meeting; the implications of same for Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29616/18]

159. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the actions requested of Ireland in order to implement the action plan on military mobility adopted by the High Representative and the European Commission on 28 March 2018; the estimated timeframe for the completion of such actions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29617/18]

161. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the details of the development and implementation of a national plan for military mobility; the details of the designated national point of contact as required by the EU; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29619/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 158, 159 and 161 together.

On 28 March 2018, the Commission issued its Action Plan on Military Mobility following

on from the November 2017 Joint Communication on improving military mobility in the EU. The Action Plan covers a number of areas: military requirements, infrastructure, dangerous goods, customs and VAT as well as cross border movement permission.

At the recent EU Council Meeting referred to, Ireland welcomed the fact that the Council Conclusions recognise that full respect will be given to the sovereignty of EU Member States over their national territory and national decision making processes regarding military movements. This is in keeping with the Action Plan on Military Mobility and is a fundamental point. Decisions on the transit of military personnel and equipment will remain a matter for each member State. Acknowledgement in the Council Conclusions of the voluntary nature of actions taken by Member States as part of military mobility initiatives is very much welcome.

One of the concrete actions identified in the Action Plan is the development of the Military Requirements which reflect the needs of the EU and its Member States, establishing geographical parameters, planning needs for movement and transport, training and security needs and access to transport resources, including private and State transport infrastructure. Technical specifications on transport infrastructure and loads is expected by July 2018, and the identification of infrastructure deemed ready is to be validated by the third quarter of 2018. A first progress report on the implementation of this Action Plan will be presented to the Member States by summer 2019.

The actions in the area of Transport Infrastructure relate to the infrastructure needs to accommodate military vehicles and suggests the identification and assessment of needs of militaries to be able to transport military vehicles – both the routes and technical requirements for the infrastructure. Member States are now invited to establish, as soon as possible, a single point of contact for information on access to transport infrastructure for military purposes and to consistently take military requirements into account when building transport infrastructure. My Department has been liaising with the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport in progressing this and with regard to establishing a single point of contact.

As you will recognise, the actions requested of Ireland in order to implement the Action Plan on Military Mobility are not restricted to the Defence area alone but affect many more Departments and agencies, such as Departments of Transport, Revenue Commissioners and Foreign Affairs and Trade. As such, any national discussions in relation to Military Mobility requires a whole of Government approach and cannot be resolved solely within my Department. Therefore, my Department is liaising with all relevant Government Departments and has highlighted the various responsibilities and will continue to co-ordinate the whole of Government position on Military Mobility.

European Defence Action Plan

160. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the details of Ireland's involvement in the two projects on cross-border movement permission and on harmonising the military requirements related to customs as part of the framework of the European Defence Agency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29618/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): On 28 March 2018, the EU Commission issued its Action Plan on Military Mobility following on from a Joint Communication on military mobility issued in November 2017.

The Commission proposes that the Union enhance its strategic transport infrastructures to make them fit for military mobility. Some of the areas being examined for improvement under

the Action Plan include streamlining procedures for diplomatic clearance, rationalising customs regulations, and reviewing transport of dangerous goods regulations and there is on-going work in the framework of the European Defence Agency (EDA) to support this.

To this end, the EDA has established two Category A Projects, following a decision of its Steering Board, to bring forward proposals/agreements in relation to (a) Cross Border Movement Permissions and (b) Common Customs arrangements for movement of Military Goods and Personnel across the EU. EDA Category A Project proposals assume the participation of all member States with an option to opt-out at any stage, as opposed to Category B proposals whereby nations have to formally opt-in. In Ireland's case, Government and Dáil approval is required for participation in both Category A and B projects.

Two Ad Hoc Working Groups will be established within the European Defence Agency to discuss each Category A project and Ireland will be represented at the meetings of these groups during the development of the technical arrangements to ensure that no obligation is placed on member States and that national sovereignty and procedures are respected. The first meeting of the Group on the customs issues met yesterday, 3 July and the first meeting of the Group on Movement Permissions will meet on 28 September.

Following completion of the development of the technical arrangements by the working groups, Ireland will assess its position in relation to participation in the two Category A projects.

Question No. 161 answered with Question No. 158.

Common Security and Defence Policy

162. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if his attention has been drawn to the details of the upcoming new joint declaration on EU-NATO co-operation in July 2018 and the obligations it will place on the EU; the involvement of Ireland in this co-operation; if it remains possible for member states to opt out of same on an individual basis; if he has expressed concerns on behalf of Ireland in the development and discussion of the joint declaration; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29620/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): It is anticipated that the upcoming NATO Summit in July will include a new Joint Declaration regarding EU-NATO Cooperation. It is expected that the declaration will focus primarily on those areas of cooperation already underway under the agreed Common Set of Proposals.

Ireland welcomes the contribution that EU-NATO co-operation makes to international peace and security through the focus on avoiding duplication of structures, systems and interoperability standards. This ensures better coherence and effectiveness on the ground in peace support and crisis management operations.

The 2016 Joint Declaration references respect for the decision-making autonomy and procedures of both organisations.

Common Security and Defence Policy

163. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to bring forward legislation to give effect to the decision agreed on 25 June 2018 with other EU Ministers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29621/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The decision referred to in the question is the Council Decision of 25 June 2018 establishing a common set of governance rules for PESCO projects.

In line with the Council Recommendation of 6 March 2018 establishing a PESCO roadmap for the way forward, a common set of governance rules for PESCO projects was adopted on 25 June 2018 at the Foreign Affairs Committee held in Luxembourg.

Roles for project participants and the PESCO Secretariat, and responsibilities for project team members are outlined in the Council Decision. The Council Decision itself provides the correct balance between legal clarity and flexibility. Ireland played an important role in the development of the common set of governance rules and welcomes in particular that they reflect the fact that PESCO is a Member State owned and driven initiative.

As the Council Decision details the general internal rules governing PESCO projects, there is no requirement for legislation to bring effect to the decision. Ireland's participation in PESCO, including the relevant projects, was agreed by Government and approved by Dáil Éireann prior to the Council Decision establishing PESCO on 11 December 2017.

Brexit Issues

164. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he and his officials have requested Brexit scenario plans from each Department and State agency since President Juncker's address to the Houses of the Oireachtas on 22 June 2018. [28673/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): President Juncker's address to the Houses of the Oireachtas on 22 June underlined the continued importance of contingency planning and preparedness. This was also stressed in the Conclusions of the European Council (Art 50) on 29 June.

The Government's process of preparing for the UK's exit from the European Union has been ongoing since the result UK referendum two years ago and is currently being taken forward through the cross-Departmental coordination structures chaired by my Department.

Contingency planning for a no-deal or worst-case outcome, bringing together the detailed work being undertaken by individual Ministers and their Departments on issues within their policy remit, is now well advanced. Its focus is on the immediate economic, regulatory, and operational challenges which would result from such an outcome. It assumes a trading relationship based on the default WTO rules, but also examines the possible effects on many other areas of concern.

This work is therefore providing baseline scenarios for the impact of Brexit across all sectors, which can then be adapted as appropriate in light of developments in the EU-UK negotiations, including in regard to transition arrangements and the future relationship. This approach is also enabling the modelling of potential responses under different scenarios, such as one where a withdrawal agreement is concluded and where a Free Trade Agreement is the basis for the future relationship between the EU and the UK.

It also takes account of the planning being undertaken at EU level by the Commission Preparedness Unit, which is issuing information notes aimed at different business sectors and examining legislative actions which may be needed at EU level.

The Government is already acting in order to get Ireland Brexit ready. Dedicated measures were announced in Budget 2018, including a new €300m Brexit Loan Scheme for Business and a €25m Brexit Response Loan Scheme for the agri-food sector as well as additional supports for capital investment in the food industry and Bord Bia marketing and promotion activities, amounting to over €50m in total. Capital expenditure of €116 billion under Project Ireland 2040 will allow the state and its agencies to properly plan major infrastructure projects while ensuring that communities and businesses can plan ahead. There was also increased funding provided to my Department in Budget 2018 for the opening of six new diplomatic missions. A further seven new Missions will be opened as part of the next phase of expanding Ireland's global footprint. These thirteen new Missions will be located in Europe, Asia, Africa, South America, North America, and Oceania and will contribute to helping our exporters find new markets.

Our Government's enterprise agencies continue to work with companies, helping them to deal with Brexit – making them more competitive, diversifying market exposure, and up-skilling teams.

In total 40 reports analysing the effects of Brexit across a broad range of sectors and in some cases setting out responses have been published to date by Government Departments. All these reports are available on a dedicated Brexit webpage on my Department's website: <https://www.dfa.ie/brexit/>.

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

Dublin-Monaghan Bombings

165. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of discussions with the British Government in regard to the Dublin-Monaghan bombings. [29049/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The implementation of the All-Party Dáil motions relating to the Dublin and Monaghan bombings is a priority for the Government, as highlighted in the Programme for a Partnership Government.

The All-Party motion on the 1974 Dublin Monaghan bombings that was adopted by the Dáil on 25 May 2016 has, like those adopted in 2008 and 2011, been conveyed to the British Government. These motions call on the British Government to allow access by an independent, international judicial figure to all original documents relating to the Dublin and Monaghan bombings, as well as the Dublin bombings of 1972 and 1973, the bombing of Kay's Tavern in Dundalk and the murder of Seamus Ludlow.

I met with Justice for the Forgotten in April to hear their views and update them on the Government's continuing engagement on legacy issues, including with the British Government on the Dáil motions.

The Government is committed to actively pursuing the implementation of these all-Party Dáil motions, and has consistently raised the issue with the British Government.

I am actively engaged with the British Government on an ongoing basis on this issue, as are officials from my Department. I have consistently underlined to the British Government that the

Dáil motions represent the consensus political view in Ireland that an independent, international judicial review of all the relevant documents is required to establish the full facts of the Dublin and Monaghan atrocities. I have also underlined that the absence of a response from the British Government is of deep concern to the Government and indeed this House, and I have emphasised the urgent need for such a response.

The Government will continue to engage with the British Government on the request in relation to the bombings, and pursue all possible avenues to achieve progress on this issue, consistent with the request made by this House.

Sustainable Development Goals

166. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if, in the context of budget 2019, he will in line with a campaign (details supplied) be spending 0.7% of GNI on overseas development aid by 2025 enabling Ireland to meet the UN sustainable development goal target of ending extreme poverty by the year 2030; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29477/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): In June 2018 the Taoiseach launched Global Ireland, a plan to double Ireland's Global Footprint by 2025. It commits the Government to publishing a White Paper on Ireland's International Development in 2018. Our ambition in the White Paper will be to position Ireland to continue to play a leadership role in achieving a better world, including through the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In Global Ireland, the Government reaffirmed its commitment to making incremental, sustainable progress towards achieving the UN target of allocating 0.7% of Gross National come to Official Development Assistance (ODA) by 2030. To achieve this will involve substantial increases to the ODA budget. For 2018, the Government has allocated €707 million for ODA. €707 million represents a very significant investment of public funds by the Government in Ireland predicated on a policy of prudent financial management, a spirit of partnership, and a culture of results. Around 70% of Irish ODA is managed by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, with the remainder provided and managed by other government departments.

Increasing the ODA budget needs to be undertaken in a phased manner taking into consideration the capacity required across Government to manage and deliver a quality aid programme. The process requires careful planning and consultation with other Government Departments and stakeholders.

Ireland's new International Development Policy currently being developed will provide the framework for ODA budget allocations. The process to develop this new policy is being led by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in close consultation with the rest of Government. The new policy will continue to reflect the whole of Government effort on international development and ensure coherence domestically and internationally.

Internal preparations and analysis are already well under way including consultation across Government. The consultation process is following Department of Public Expenditure and Reform guidelines. I intend to launch a public consultation phase on 12th July involving both public meetings and online opportunities for the public and partners to input. The new International Development Policy will be launched in the autumn, taking on board the outputs from the public consultation phase. These discussions and the new policy will inform our budget deliberations in relation to the allocations of ODA in budget 2019.

Election Monitoring Missions

167. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to concerns about the lack of transparency in regard to the election observation roster that his Department maintains (details supplied); and the steps he is taking to address these concerns. [29545/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): International election monitoring missions play an important role in the promotion of democracy and human rights. We aim to ensure that, when requested, Ireland is represented at an appropriate level on international observation missions for elections and constitutional referendums. Irish observers participate primarily in missions organised by the European Union and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). I refer the Deputy to the responses to previous parliamentary questions on this matter, Questions 165 and 170 of 25 October 2017 and Questions 393, 394 and 396 of 26 July 2017.

Following a comprehensive review and a public call for applicants, a roster of 200 members with a reserve panel of 10 was established in May 2013. The roster was determined by an independent appraisal process.

The criteria for selection for observation missions were set out in the Information Note for Applicants accompanying the call for applications to join the Election Observation Roster. This is unchanged, both in selection criteria and methodology.

For each election observation mission to which Ireland proposes to deploy observers, all roster members are invited to express their interest in the mission with a view to ensuring the widest possible participation. A shortlist is drawn up based on the specific criteria set out by the EU or OSCE, including relevant local and regional experience, language proficiency, gender and length of time since serving on a mission. In many cases, the EU and OSCE also invite Member States to nominate new observers or observers with limited experience. However, the final decision rests with the inviting body, usually the OSCE or the European Union.

The call for applications to establish a new Election Observation roster issued on 2 July and will run until 20 August. Late applications will not be accepted. The call will be published on two Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade websites, www.dfa.ie and www.irishaid.ie, and will also be publicised on the Department's social media.

A candidate information booklet setting out all of the necessary details including the eligibility requirements and the process leading to the establishment of the roster will be on the aforementioned websites.

In terms of the selection of candidates for the new roster, candidates will need to demonstrate for the first qualifying stage that they meet the essential criteria set out in the application booklet. The second stage is a qualitative scoring of their application under specific headings related to election observation and democratisation.

The process to appoint these volunteers to the roster will be managed by the Election Observation Desk in the Department and the volunteer mobilisation will be run in accordance with established best practice.

Departmental Contracts Data

168. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and

Trade the number of times his Department has engaged polling companies and-or Irish market researchers to conduct research on its behalf in each of the past two years; the names of such companies; the associated costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29575/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department has not engaged research organisations of the type described by the Deputy over the past two years.

Insurance Costs

169. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Finance if he and the Minister of State with special responsibility for financial services and insurance will continue to meet a group (details supplied) to ensure that the views of policyholders are fully represented in the reform of the insurance market. [28664/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I welcome the role that the Alliance for Insurance Reform is taking in regard to the issue of the cost of insurance, particularly for businesses and voluntary organisations. The Minister of State for Financial Services and Insurance, Mr Michael D’Arcy TD, has formally met with the Alliance, and relevant issues were discussed. Both Minister D’Arcy and I are very conscious of the impact that the volatility in insurance prices in the last few years has had on businesses, Alliance members as well as other organisations. The Alliance has put its viewpoints across at Joint Oireachtas Committee appearances, while its members have submitted a large number of representations to the Department, both directly and through Senators and TDs, who have also tabled Parliamentary Questions on behalf of the group.

In particular, the reforms being sought by the Alliance in its “10 asks” are well known, but practically all relate to issues which were comprehensively examined and considered by the Cost of Insurance Working Group in the course of producing its two reports, namely the Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance and the Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance. Indeed, having considered the matter in some detail, a number of these measures are in the process of being implemented, such as amending Section 8 of the Civil Liability and Courts Act 2004 and establishing a procedure to ensure exaggerated and misleading claims are referred to the Gardaí for investigation and prosecution, if appropriate. In respect of other issues, put forward by the Alliance such as changing the approach to calculating the Book of Quantum, Minister D’Arcy has already indicated that there are constitutional issues which need to be first considered, thus explaining why the Working Group referred the matter to the Law Reform Commission for examination.

It should be also be noted that Minister D’Arcy and my Department generally have been involved in consulting extensively with various stakeholders across the insurance sector including groups representing the interests of policyholders on an ongoing basis, most particularly through the Cost of Insurance Working Group project. Indeed, the primary objective of the Working Group ultimately is to ensure the delivery of fairer premiums for consumers and businesses through setting the conditions for a more stable and competitive insurance market.

Finally, both the Minister of State and our officials will continue to meet relevant stakeholders and representative groups throughout the implementation of both Reports.

Departmental Investigations

170. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 222 of 2 July 2013, the cost and outcomes of the investigation referred to as ongoing at the time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29467/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by the Special Liquidators that they are in the process of collating the requested information for the Deputy but it was not ready in its entirety in order to answer the PQ within the timeframe provided. I will write directly to the Deputy with a response once the information has been received by my Department.

Tax Reliefs Data

171. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Finance the changes planned for the capital acquisition tax thresholds and rates over the next three years. [29474/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In general consideration of Capital Acquisitions Tax (CAT) thresholds and rates are undertaken within the annual Budgetary and Finance Bill process. As is normal, the Deputy will appreciate that I cannot comment on any possible changes in advance of the 2019 Budget. In addition, it would be impossible for me to comment on any possible changes in respect of future Budgets.

The Deputy will be aware that considerable changes have been made to all three CAT thresholds in recent budgets:

The Group A threshold increased from €225,000 to €280,000 in Budget 2016, and to €310,000 in Budget 2017. This threshold applies where the beneficiary is a child (including certain foster children) or minor child of a deceased child of the disponent. Parents also fall within this threshold where they take an absolute inheritance from a child. The Group B threshold increased from €30,150 to €32,500 in Budget 2017. This threshold applies where the beneficiary is a brother, sister, niece, nephew, or lineal ancestor or lineal descendant of the disponent. The Group C threshold increased from €15,075 to €16,250 in Budget 2017. This threshold applies in all other cases.

NAMA Receivers

172. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the amount paid to receivers by NAMA to date and by year; the fees received by each receiver to date in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29483/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by NAMA that receivers appointed to NAMA-secured properties are selected from NAMA's insolvency service provider panel which was established following a competitive public procurement process. I am advised that, arising from this process, very competitive fixed-fee rates were achieved relative to prevailing market norms.

I am advised that, in general, fees are not paid to receivers directly by NAMA but are instead paid out of the proceeds of assets under receivership or the management of these assets, pending realisation. Fees for any particular insolvency are set by reference to the fees quoted by the insolvency practitioner as part of the public procurement process. All appointments are subject to on-going monitoring and evaluation and, in many cases, additional fee reductions are negotiated to ensure that fees are appropriate for the amount of work remaining on any given appointment. Typically fees reduce as the assignment progresses and the number of assets reduces by

way of disposals or otherwise. However, this depends on the complexity of the insolvency and the issues that may emerge during its course.

I would also refer the Deputy to Section 10 of the NAMA Act which obliges NAMA to obtain the best achievable return for the State. NAMA's preference is to work on a consensual basis with debtors so as to maximise the return from their assets. In instances where a receiver has been appointed over a debtor's assets, it is often due to the debtor's unwillingness to cooperate with NAMA. Upon appointment, a receiver takes control of the debtor's assets and any income produced by them. The receiver's legal obligation to maximise the return on the assets aligns well with NAMA's Section 10 requirements.

The fees approved by NAMA to receivers for their work on NAMA-secured assets from inception to end-June 2018 are outlined in the table attached. This includes fees approved to receivers who were appointed to assets prior to the acquisition of the related loans by NAMA.

Insolvency Practitioner fees approved from inception to 30 June 2018

Insolvency Practitioner	IP Fees 2010 €	IP Fees 2011 €	IP Fees 2012 €	IP Fees 2013 €	IP Fees 2014 €
Alder King	-	-	-	-	-
Allsop	-	450,000	-	7,130	543,661
Bannon Commercial	-	3,750	15,000	114,165	84,553
BDO	21,500	480,193	298,600	663,442	842,086
BDO UK	105,148	521,461	835,615	513,958	442,101
Begbies Traynor	64,034	209,382	216,765	194,017	184,932
BNP/Allsops	-	-	-	-	2,360
BTW Shiells	-	60,756	33,197	2,084	64,487
Capita Symonds	-	45,232	40,906	-	-
Cavanagh Kelly	-	-	18,333	8,380	3,624
CBRE	888	130,188	117,332	7,500	7,500
CBRE UK	-	-	66,375	22,383	99,767
Chantrey Vellacott	-	16,667	36,553	94,297	218,460
Colliers	-	-	-	13,100	9,850
Colliers UK	-	-	10,030	3,186	-
Cordes & Co	-	-	43,395	66,276	-

Insolvency Practitioner	IP Fees 2010 €	IP Fees 2011 €	IP Fees 2012 €	IP Fees 2013 €	IP Fees 2014 €
Crowe Howarth	-	55,333	151,534	372,003	690,623
Cushman Wakefield (UK)	-	-	3,403	3,321	-
CVR Global	-	-	-	-	-
Deloitte	744,426	658,233	796,291	807,017	1,004,876
Deloitte (UK)	-	90,730	84,333	77,880	123,711
Douglas Newman Good	-	-	4,166	77,083	68,750
Dr Peter Minuth (Piepenburg Geerling)	-	-	-	-	84,000
DTZ	-	7,380	62,730	46,780	38,500
DTZ - Now CBRE	-	-	2,500	2,500	2,500
Duff & Phelps	5,222	983,992	1,155,898	1,482,497	1,867,732
Duff & Phelps LLP	-	-	-	359,671	1,298,686
EY	12,220	449,927	967,073	1,066,075	921,950
EY UK	-	93,810	31,860	27,730	-
Eddisons	-	-	-	-	4,167
Edward Symmonds/ LSH	-	-	28,882	23,193	30,348
Edward Symmons	-	-	39,648	41,421	15,933
Ferris & Associates	28,466	587,748	359,305	488,193	210,393
Friel Stafford	-	-	24,000	105,498	100,130
FRP Advisory	-	-	156,755	20,000	337,329
Ganly Waters	-	43,520	121,300	8,400	41,850
Grant Thornton	135,159	1,566,113	2,023,534	2,414,292	2,474,273

Questions - Written Answers

Insolvency Practitioner	IP Fees 2010 €	IP Fees 2011 €	IP Fees 2012 €	IP Fees 2013 €	IP Fees 2014 €
Grant Thornton (UK)	-	1,236,387	1,111,038	1,637,269	735,653
GVA Bilfinger	-	-	-	-	-
GVA Donal O’Buachalla	-	3,100	98,875	180,652	297,801
GVA Grimley	-	378,246	141,756	63,914	192,851
HBC	-	19,568	17,266	4,316	-
Hooke & McDonald	-	-	-	30,565	32,545
Hughes Blake	-	-	66,550	368,992	328,987
HWBC	-	-	188,625	215,396	175,000
HWBC Allsop	-	-	-	-	10,040
Irvine Nott	-	-	-	-	5,900
Johnston Carmichael	-	-	70,800	64,900	18,880
Jones Lang LaSalle	-	12,980	89,160	109,160	135,623
Keenan Corporate	-	153,410	310,223	297,760	199,273
Knight Frank	-	-	-	9,600	6,000
KPMG	106,666	1,292,726	1,838,161	2,164,172	1,859,413
KPMG UK	-	598,702	1,603,370	726,064	326,875
LSH (previously BTW Sheils)	95,808	95,808	95,808	107,577	84,730
Lisney	-	-	222,455	275,897	162,212
Mason Owen Lyons	-	-	32,000	35,500	37,400
Mazars	328,953	638,878	802,500	1,002,295	1,622,067
McKeogh Gallagher Ryan	-	178,129	238,199	397,162	618,567
McPeake Auctioneers	-	-	-	3,700	17,800
McStay Luby	148,753	560,745	274,374	266,174	296,645

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Insolvency Practitioner	IP Fees 2010 €	IP Fees 2011 €	IP Fees 2012 €	IP Fees 2013 €	IP Fees 2014 €
Moore Stephens Nathans	-	-	-	-	-
Moorefield					
O'Connor Pyne & Co Limited	-	-	-	-	-
O'Dwyer Property Management	-	-	155,915	146,021	157,088
Osborne King	-	6,136	6,313	2,974	10,195
PKF O'Connor Leddy Holmes	-	-	-	-	7,000
PKF/BDO UK	-	-	28,615	341,020	-
PwC	307,466	911,769	1,294,498	1,581,837	1,395,919
PwC UK	-	289,882	334,908	340,710	54,785
RSM Ireland	-	896,382	589,137	656,992	572,705
RSM McClure Watters	-	268,680	156,553	253,009	274,534
RSM UK	-	1,061,641	1,433,372	949,933	733,088
Russell Brennan Keane	-	17,755	37,457	77,022	163,067
Savills	-	283,324	372,531	378,453	225,667
Smith Williamson	-	-	103,610	270,049	411,936
SPW UK	-	52,794	50,698	43,056	2,778
WK Nowlan	-	63,985	41,200	36,630	90,678
Total	2,104,709	15,475,442	19,551,278	22,172,243	23,082,832

Insolvency Practitioner	IP Fees 2015 €	IP Fees 2016€	IP Fees 2017€	IP Fees 2018€	Total IP Fees €
Alder King	8,502	-	-		8,502
Allsop	105,750	95,000	-		1,201,541

Questions - Written Answers

Insolvency Practitioner	IP Fees 2015 €	IP Fees 2016€	IP Fees 2017€	IP Fees 2018€	Total IP Fees €
Bannon Commercial	56,450	46,725	-		320,643
BDO	1,023,692	580,840	399,875		4,310,228
BDO UK	135,443	53,700	-		2,607,426
Begbies Traynor	77,470	2,250	-		948,850
BNP/Allsops	-	-	-		2,360
BTW Shiells	-	-	-		160,524
Capita Symonds	-	-	-		86,138
Cavanagh Kelly	-	-	-		30,337
CBRE	938	-	-		264,346
CBRE UK	-	-	-		188,525
Chantrey Vellacott	-	-	-		365,977
Colliers	-	-	-		22,950
Colliers UK	-	-	-		13,216
Cordes & Co	-	-	-		109,671
Crowe Howarth	780,285	602,154	304,340	156,900	3,113,172
Cushman Wakefield (UK)	-	-	-		6,724
CVR Global	-	16,667	98,333		115,000
Deloitte	1,046,985	1,183,144	1,482,213	1,475,049	9,198,234
Deloitte (UK)	441,646	-	-		818,301
Douglas Newman Good	75,834	35,000	-		260,833
Dr Peter Minuth (Piepenburg Geerling)	504,000	-	-		588,000

Insolvency Practitioner	IP Fees 2015 €	IP Fees 2016€	IP Fees 2017€	IP Fees 2018€	Total IP Fees €
DTZ	33,210	-	-		188,600
DTZ - Now CBRE	-	-	-		7,500
Duff & Phelps	1,960,975	957,820	875,211	152,925	9,442,272
Duff & Phelps LLP	-	-	-		1,658,357
EY	1,094,314	396,395	283,683	220,000	5,411,637
EY UK	-	-	-		153,400
Eddisons	9,108	-	-		13,275
Edward Symmonds/ LSH	13,335	-	-		95,758
Edward Symmons	14,750	5,940	-		117,692
Ferris & As- sociates	144,720	60,000	10,000		1,888,825
Friel Stafford	78,983	40,944	32,850		382,405
FRP Advi- sory	143,565	-	-		657,649
Ganly Waters	2,625	12,810	7,691		238,197
Grant Thorn- ton	2,227,772	1,387,202	2,014,908	778,613	15,021,866
Grant Thorn- ton (UK)	184,897	-	-		4,905,244
GVA Bilfin- ger	-	30,000	-		30,000
GVA Donal O’Buachalla	254,379	106,986	75,855	15,290	1,032,938
GVA Grim- ley	32,353	9,540	-		818,659
HBC	-	-	-		41,150
Hooke & McDonald	27,091	-	-		90,201
Hughes Blake	313,276	136,306	20,938	11,940	1,246,989
HWBC	364,500	320,000	278,000		1,541,521

Questions - Written Answers

Insolvency Practitioner	IP Fees 2015 €	IP Fees 2016€	IP Fees 2017€	IP Fees 2018€	Total IP Fees €
HWBC All-sop	24,133	-	-		34,173
Irvine Nott	-	-	-		5,900
Johnston Carmichael	-	-	-		154,580
Jones Lang LaSalle	95,000	37,000	-		478,923
Keenan Corporate	71,971	22,868	-		1,055,505
Knight Frank	15,000	-	-		30,600
KPMG	1,748,573	832,083	297,875		10,139,670
KPMG UK	211,970	146,025	-		3,613,006
LSH (previously BTW Sheils)	105,445	2,950	-		588,126
Lisney	120,550	80,000	70,000	76,670	1,007,784
Mason Owen Lyons	37,370	18,265	-		160,535
Mazars	1,639,495	1,259,861	1,263,418	361,142	8,918,609
McKeogh Gallagher Ryan	653,116	313,771	165,721	18,000	2,582,665
McPeake Auctioneers	14,780	-	-		36,280
McStay Luby	348,254	475,773	560,725	143,795	3,075,238
Moore Stephens Nathans	42,515	-	-		42,515
Moorefield				11,000	11,000
O'Connor Pyne & Co Limited	21,125	-	-		21,125
O'Dwyer Property Management	175,535	136,690	116,272	108,273	995,794
Osborne King	-	-	-		25,618

Insolvency Practitioner	IP Fees 2015 €	IP Fees 2016€	IP Fees 2017€	IP Fees 2018€	Total IP Fees €
PKF O'Connor Leddy Hol- mes	5,691	-	-		12,691
PKF/BDO UK	-	-	-		369,635
PwC	893,638	671,308	482,529	185,250	7,724,214
PwC UK	-	-	-		1,020,285
RSM Ireland	879,937	624,815	825,946	871,706	5,917,620
RSM Mc- Clure Watters	85,330	-	-		1,038,105
RSM UK	602,703	216,936	85,271	9,272	5,092,215
Russell Bren- nan Keane	420,036	448,165	481,185	151,660	1,796,346
Savills	195,000	162,500	152,703	9,000	1,779,178
Smith Wil- liamson	384,188	138,980	24,302	15,023	1,348,088
SPW UK	-	-	-		149,326
WK Nowlan	39,577	-	-		272,070
Total	19,987,779	11,667,413	10,409,844	4,771,508	129,223,047

Mortgage Lending

173. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 121 and 123 of 26 June 2018, if the Central Bank has undertaken an assessment of compliance with provision 6.12 of the consumer protection code 2012 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29501/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Central Bank has advised that the objective of the recent review it undertook was to assess whether or not lenders were advertising mortgages with cashback offers in a clear and unambiguous way.

The review therefore assessed lenders' compliance with certain provisions of Chapter 4 (relating to the provision of information) and Chapter 9 (relating to advertising) of the Consumer Protection Code. It also assessed lenders' compliance with Part 4 of the S.I. No. 142/2016 - European Union (Consumer Mortgage Credit Agreements) Regulations 2016 (relating to information and practices preliminary to the conclusion of the credit agreement).

Tribunals of Inquiry Recommendations

174. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if all recommendations of the Moriarty tribunal have been implemented; the recommendations that are outstanding; and when they will be implemented. [29040/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In response to the Deputy's question, the Moriarty Tribunal made a number of recommendations which affected a number of Government Departments. As Minister for Finance I can only respond in relation to the recommendations made in relation to my own Department.

The tribunal pointed out problems to be addressed in our system of financial regulation. Poor supervision, an overly-deferential attitude by regulators, poor assessment of risks and a lack of follow-through on enforcement, all played a part in the financial crisis. I and my European counterparts have been working steadfastly since the financial crisis to bring about strengthened oversight and resolution regimes. The entire financial services landscape has changed utterly, characterised by the presence of new European institutions; strengthened regulations; a more intrusive supervisory approach; and a new focus on macroprudential requirements.

New European regulations have strengthened controls over the banking system and have resulted in an overhaul of regulation, supervision and resolution regimes. The Capital Requirements Regulation and Directive, which came into force in 2014, brought about significant enhancements in the quality and quantity of capital that banks are required to hold and the setting of minimum liquidity requirements.

The Banking Recovery and Resolution Directive (BRRD) and the Single Resolution Mechanism have transformed the framework for dealing with failing banks and are designed to provide a financial safety net and a means for recovery and resolution with minimum disruption to the sovereign. The overarching objective of the BRRD is to shift the cost of bank failure from taxpayers to shareholders and creditors of the institutions themselves.

The Single Supervisory Mechanism (SSM) is now responsible for the prudential supervision framework for euro area banks. The central piece of the SSM supervisory process is the Supervisory Review and Evaluation Process (SREP) under which European Central Bank led joint supervisory teams inspect business models, internal governance, profitability and banking risks.

All of these new regulations and institutional arrangements have been designed to address the challenges of banking oversight and resolution at a European level and provide for a proactive approach towards systemic and emergent risks at a European level.

Besides the introduction of new European and national regulations, the Central Bank too has increased its resources and has become more pro-active in addressing systemic risk.

In response to the Tribunal recommendations, I considered the provision of tax relief for donations to political parties and decided against introducing such relief. The Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012 provided for changes to the Electoral Act, 1997 and imposed new limits for donations. Donations to individuals exceeding €600 must be declared and donations exceeding €1,000 in any one year may not be accepted. Political party donations greater than €1,500 must be declared and donations greater than €2,500 in any one year may not be accepted. These limits, in themselves, should act to deter any attempts by wealthy individuals to influence political activity.

Recommendation: Representations to Revenue by Office holders -

In relation to this proposal, I remain of the view that this recommendation could best be considered in the context of the Government's overall approach to political and parliamentary

reform. Representations are a valid part of the political process. The Government may wish to consider whether this recommendation should be confined to Revenue, or to Office holders, or whether the Commissioners decision to publish data on the volume of representations made by each Deputy is an adequate response.

The Office of the Revenue Commissioners has advised in relation to the following recommendations of the Moriarty Tribunal that:

Recommendation: Independence of the Revenue Commissioners-

Section 101 of the Minister and Secretaries (Amendment) Act 2011 placed on a statutory basis the independence of the Revenue Commissioners in the exercise by the Commissioners of their statutory functions under the various taxation and customs enactments. This has given effect to the recommendation of the Report of the Tribunal into Payments to Politicians and Related Matters (that is, the report of Mr. Justice Moriarty), that the principle or convention of the independence of the Revenue Commissioners be placed on the more robust status of a legislative provision.

Recommendation: Transmission to other agencies of information obtained by Revenue under bilateral agreements –

This recommendation has been considered. These agreements are international treaties which are very precisely drawn as to the purpose for which information may be used and would not permit such transmission. However, if opportunities arise in the future, the Commissioners will consider the matter further. The Deputy will appreciate that Revenue is not in a position to comment on matters relating to individuals for reasons of taxpayer confidentiality.

Departmental Contracts Data

175. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of times his Department has engaged polling companies and/or Irish market researchers to conduct research on its behalf in each of the past two years; the names of such companies; the costs associated with same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29574/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The use of polling companies and/or Irish market researchers to conduct research on behalf of my Department since June 2016 is outlined in the following table.

Company Name	Associated Costs	Year	Detail
Indecon International Economic Consultants	€96,890.79 (€78,773 plus VAT)	2018	A mini competition was run from December 2017 to January 2018 for research services to benchmark payments in Ireland. Indecon was the successful tenderer. The research is currently underway and is expected to be completed by Q4 2018. The approach taken did not include polling or surveys but incorporated both desk research using existing data sources and primary research such as consulting with companies and representative bodies within the payments industry. Payment will be made on delivery of the final report.

Questions - Written Answers

Company Name	Associated Costs	Year	Detail
Coyne Research	This whole campaign is funded by contributions from AIB and PTSB as a condition of the approval of their restructuring plans by the EU Commission and there is no cost to the taxpayer. The research was priced at €7,500 (ex VAT).	2018	The research was part of the SwitchYourBank. ie media campaign to encourage consumer switching in the retail banking sector. The 2018 expenditure relates to phase 2 of the campaign. Language was the supplier for the campaign that subcontracted Coyne to conduct market research.
Fitzpatrick Associates Economic Consultants	Invoice not received as research on-going	2018	Bi-annual Credit Demand Survey - Costs recouped from BoI and AIB as per recapitalisation agreement
Coyne Research	This whole campaign is funded by contributions from AIB and PTSB as a condition of the approval of their restructuring plans by the EU Commission and there is no cost to the taxpayer. The research was priced at €12,000 (ex VAT).	2017	The research was part of the SwitchYourBank. ie media campaign to encourage consumer switching in the retail banking sector. The 2017 expenditure relates to phase 1 of the campaign. Language was the supplier for the campaign that subcontracted Coyne to conduct market research.
Behaviour and Attitudes	€64,575.00	2017	Bi-annual Credit Demand Survey - Costs recouped from BoI and AIB as per recapitalisation agreement
Fitzpatrick Associates Economic Consultants	€73,738.50	2017	Bi-annual Credit Demand Survey - Costs recouped from BoI and AIB as per recapitalisation agreement
ERSI	€68,639.00	2017	Joint research programme on the macro economy, taxation, and banking
Coyne Research	This whole campaign is funded by contributions from AIB and PTSB as a condition of the approval of their restructuring plans by the EU Commission and there is no cost to the taxpayer. The research was priced at €46,000 (ex VAT).	2016	The research was part of the SwitchYourBank. ie media campaign to encourage consumer switching in the retail banking sector. The 2016 expenditure relates to phase 1 of the campaign. Language was the supplier for the campaign that subcontracted Coyne to conduct market research.
Behaviour and Attitudes	€64,575.00	2016	Bi-annual Credit Demand Survey - Costs recouped from BoI and AIB as per recapitalisation agreement

The Deputy may wish to note that the indicated time-frame under consideration is taken to be from June 2016 to June 2018.

Tax Appeals Commission

176. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of tax appeals before the Tax Appeals Commission; the value of tax these disputes amount to; the appeals by ranges (details supplied), respectively, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29627/18]

177. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the age and value of tax appeals before the Tax Appeals Commission by ranges (details supplied), respectively, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29628/18]

178. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of new appeals brought before the Tax Appeals Commission in each month since January 2016; the number of cases concluded in each month since January 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29629/18]

179. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of appeals before the Tax Appeals Commission that have been concluded since January 2016 that have been settled; the value of the settled appeals; the number that have been withdrawn; the value these amounted to; the number of cases that have been heard; the value these appeals amounted to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29630/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 176 to 179, inclusive, together.

The TAC was established on 21st March 2016 and new procedures for making, processing, adjudicating and determining appeals came into effect. Before this date taxpayers sent their appeals directly to Revenue who then transferred cases to the Appeal Commissioners when they were ready for a hearing. Since that date, taxpayers send their appeals directly to the TAC which then notifies Revenue of the appeals. The TAC has full control over the processing and hearing of appeals.

I am advised by the TAC that the number of appeals before it can change frequently, depending on a number of factors, including the number of additional appeals received each day; the numbers closed each day; how many appeals are part-settled and how many that will settle based on the outcome of a “leader-case”. The Commission can also be informed, by an appellant(s) or the Revenue Commissioners, that an appeal has settled or been withdrawn which might indicate a reduction in the number of appeals on hand; however, until this is confirmed by both parties, the TAC cannot deem the matter closed.

I am further advised by the TAC that it is not possible, for the most part, to provide the age of tax appeals before it, as many of them were transmitted to the Commission, in large tranches during 2016 by the Office of the Revenue Commissioners. In relation to those ‘legacy’ appeals, some were submitted by the appellant in 2016, to Revenue, but many had been with Revenue for some time before that. Therefore, it is only possible to advise of when the TAC received appeals in 2016, 2017 and 2018.

Following its establishment in 2016, I am informed that approximately 3,322 appeals transferred to the TAC, at various stages during 2016, from both the Office of the Revenue Commissioners and the Office of the Appeal Commissioners. The TAC has further advised me that, as of 2 July, 2018 it currently has approximately 3,312 active appeals under its remit.

The TAC has informed me that this figure comprises of the following active appeals:

Appeals	Number
Appeals received 2016:	339
Appeals received 2017:	1,182
Appeals received 2018:	737
Legacy Appeals:	795
Pre Establishment:	178

Appeals	Number
Cases Stated:	81
Total	3,312

The TAC has provided the following tables outlining the number of new appeals received and concluded in each month since March 2016 and an outline of how appeals were closed from January, 2017.

Table 1 – New Appeals Per Month from 21 March 2016, when the TAC was established, to 31 December 2016

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Appeals Received			112	83	74	90	113	71	81	78	94	105
Appeals Closed			16	9	14	15	24	14	14	22	40	41

Table 2 – New Appeals Per Month 2017

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Appeals Received	562	75	177	99	106	82	106	89	108	94	107	153
Appeals Closed	52	39	75	53	131	52	52	45	19	50	44	84

Table 3 – New Appeals Per Month 2018

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Appeals Received	264	134	160	104	192	61
Appeals Closed	65	320	150	137	125	79

Table 4 – How Appeals Were Closed

Year	Settled	Withdrawn	Determined	Dismissed	Refused	Merged	Total
2016*							209
2017**	412	178	40	41	7	18	696
2018***	423	128	17	118	174	16	876

* A breakdown of how appeals were closed in 2016 is provided in the Annual Report of 2016.

** 34 determinations were made in 2017 which affected 40 individual appeals.

*** 17 appeals have been determined in 2018 to date but 5 appeals are classed as Case Stated so they will remain active until the appeals have been heard by the High Court. Another determination made in 2018 related to a Case Stated in 2017 which has now been completed.

With regard to the value of tax that these disputes amount to, the following information has been provided by the Revenue Commissioners. It should be noted however that, while Revenue also maintains statistics on appeals, for various reasons these will not necessarily correspond with those provided by the TAC. For example, there may be time lags in the notification of new appeals by the TAC to Revenue and time lags in the closure of appeals by the TAC following

settlement of an appeal by agreement between Revenue and the appellant. As the TAC is now the competent body for the management of appeals, I consider that it is appropriate that it be the primary source for appeals statistics. However, there is one important piece of information that the TAC does not currently receive for those appeals made directly to it. This is the value figure for the amount of tax that is outstanding or in dispute.

I have been advised by Revenue of the following information in relation to the amount of tax in dispute with both corresponding value bands and age bands.

Band (€)	Total in dispute (€)
Below 10,000	8,857,022
10,000 to 50,000	27,823,637
50,000 to 1,000,000	241,019,031
1,000,000 to 5,000,000	296,901,742
Above 5,000,000	1,077,958,522
Total	1,652,559,954

Band (€)	Age (years)	Total in dispute (€)
Below 10,000	Less than 2	6,227,972
Below 10,000	2 to 5	2,430,773
Below 10,000	6 to 10	175,911
Below 10,000	Older than 10	22,366
10,000 to 50,000	Less than 2	7,876,221
10,000 to 50,000	2 to 5	15,947,769
10,000 to 50,000	6 to 10	3,622,980
10,000 to 50,000	Older than 10	376,667
50,000 to 1,000,000	Less than 2	51,958,123
50,000 to 1,000,000	2 to 5	130,243,388
50,000 to 1,000,000	6 to 10	55,298,194
50,000 to 1,000,000	Older than 10	3,519,326
1,000,000 to 5,000,000	Less than 2	45,267,724
1,000,000 to 5,000,000	2 to 5	143,470,676
1,000,000 to 5,000,000	6 to 10	95,695,757
1,000,000 to 5,000,000	Older than 10	12,467,585
Above 5,000,000	Less than 2	427,702,956
Above 5,000,000	2 to 5	470,843,250
Above 5,000,000	6 to 10	164,146,202
Above 5,000,000	Older than 10	15,266,114
Total		1,652,559,954

I have been informed by Revenue that the information requested by the Deputy relating to the value of settled, withdrawn and heard appeals is not collected centrally and cannot be provided. Revenue is currently looking at ways in which such information might be provided in the future.

Tax Reliefs Abolition

180. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the restoration of tax relief for union subscriptions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29644/18]

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

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

The review concluded that:

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

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

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

Office of Public Works Properties

181. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status and future plans for a closed OPW building (details supplied). [29475/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The former Garda station in Quin, Co. Clare was among the 139 Garda stations identified for closure by An Garda Síochána in 2012 and 2013. Many of these properties reverted to the OPW to identify an alternative State use or manage their disposal.

In 2016, An Garda Síochána/Policing Authority undertook a review of the closed Garda Stations under the Programme for a Partnership Government. In late 2017, the preliminary review initially identified six stations for re-opening. These were:

- Ballinspittle, Co Cork
- Bawnboy, Co Cavan
- Leighlinbridge, Co Carlow
- Donard, Co Wicklow
- Stepside, Co Dublin
- Rush, Co Dublin

The Programme for a Partnership Government also requested the Policing Authority to oversee a review of ‘both the boundaries of Garda districts and the dispersal of Garda stations in rural areas and in developing urban and suburban areas with a view to ensuring both an efficient

and optimum geographical distribution of stations'. In this regard, the Acting Garda Commissioner requested the OPW not to dispose of any additional former Garda stations, pending the outcome of the review.

Once the review is completed, the future of the former station at Quin will be determined.

State Properties

182. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the State and NAMA owned buildings in Newbridge. [29534/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): I wish to advise the Deputy that NAMA does not own property. Instead NAMA acquired loans and its role is as a secured lender.

NAMA is prohibited from disclosing confidential debtor information under Sections 99 and 202 of the NAMA Act, including information on the location and type of assets owned by debtors. As a result it is not possible to identify particular assets which secure NAMA loans in Newbridge, as I am advised that to do so could identify the owners of these properties as NAMA debtors. However, while not identifying specific properties, I am advised that NAMA holds security over a single commercial property in Newbridge town, as well as a number of plots of land in the surrounding areas.

NAMA's Annual Report & Financial Statements for 2017, which was launched last month and which is available on the NAMA website, www.nama.ie, includes information on the property collateral securing NAMA's remaining loan portfolio. I am advised that, as of 31 December 2017, just 4% of the remaining property portfolio securing NAMA loans was located in Kildare.

There are c.100 non-commercial State organisations that hold property - from Central Government Departments to Local Authorities, Education Training Boards, the IDA etc. In addition there are State-owned commercial bodies that hold property. I am not in a position to answer on behalf of all of these organisations, and can only answer for what the Commissioners for Public Works hold in their own right, or on behalf of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. The Commissioners of Public Works have 6 properties in Newbridge - the Garda Station and two Garda residences on Main Street, the Department of Defence Offices on Station Road, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection offices on Moorefield Road and a small office building on Eyre Street.

Tribunals of Inquiry Recommendations

183. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if all recommendations of the Moriarty tribunal have been implemented; the recommendations that are outstanding; and when they will be implemented. [29040/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In response to the Deputy's question, the Moriarty Tribunal made a number of recommendations which affected a number of Government Departments. As Minister for Finance I can only respond in relation to the recommendations made in relation to my own Department.

The tribunal pointed out problems to be addressed in our system of financial regulation. Poor supervision, an overly deferential attitude by regulators, poor assessment of risks and a lack of follow-through on enforcement, all played a part in the financial crisis. I and my European

counterparts have been working steadfastly since the financial crisis to bring about strengthened oversight and resolution regimes. The entire financial services landscape has changed utterly, characterised by the presence of new European institutions; strengthened regulations; a more intrusive supervisory approach; and a new focus on macroprudential requirements.

New European regulations have strengthened controls over the banking system and have resulted in an overhaul of regulation, supervision and resolution regimes. The Capital Requirements Regulation and Directive, which came into force in 2014, brought about significant enhancements in the quality and quantity of capital that banks are required to hold and the setting of minimum liquidity requirements.

The Banking Recovery and Resolution Directive (BRRD) and the Single Resolution Mechanism have transformed the framework for dealing with failing banks and are designed to provide a financial safety net and a means for recovery and resolution with minimum disruption to the sovereign. The overarching objective of the BRRD is to shift the cost of bank failure from taxpayers to shareholders and creditors of the institutions themselves.

The Single Supervisory Mechanism (SSM) is now responsible for the prudential supervision framework for euro area banks. The central piece of the SSM supervisory process is the Supervisory Review and Evaluation Process (SREP) under which European Central Bank led joint supervisory teams inspect business models, internal governance, profitability and banking risks.

All of these new regulations and institutional arrangements have been designed to address the challenges of banking oversight and resolution at a European level and provide for a proactive approach towards systemic and emergent risks at a European level.

Besides the introduction of new European and national regulations, the Central Bank too has increased its resources and has become more pro-active in addressing systemic risk.

In response to the Tribunal recommendations, I considered the provision of tax relief for donations to political parties and decided against introducing such relief. The Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012 provided for changes to the Electoral Act, 1997 and imposed new limits for donations. Donations to individuals exceeding €600 must be declared and donations exceeding €1,000 in any one year may not be accepted. Political party donations greater than €1,500 must be declared and donations greater than €2,500 in any one year may not be accepted. These limits, in themselves, should act to deter any attempts by wealthy individuals to influence political activity.

Recommendation: Representations to Revenue by Office holders -

In relation to this proposal, I remain of the view that this recommendation could best be considered in the context of the Government's overall approach to political and parliamentary reform. Representations are a valid part of the political process. The Government may wish to consider whether this recommendation should be confined to Revenue, or to Office holders, or whether the Commissioners decision to publish data on the volume of representations made by each Deputy is an adequate response.

The Office of the Revenue Commissioners has advised in relation to the following recommendations of the Moriarty Tribunal that:

Recommendation: Independence of the Revenue Commissioners-

Section 101 of the Minister and Secretaries (Amendment) Act 2011 placed on a statutory basis the independence of the Revenue Commissioners in the exercise by the Commissioners

of their statutory functions under the various taxation and customs enactments. This has given effect to the recommendation of the Report of the Tribunal into Payments to Politicians and Related Matters (that is, the report of Mr. Justice Moriarty), that the principle or convention of the independence of the Revenue Commissioners be placed on the more robust status of a legislative provision.

Recommendation: Transmission to other agencies of information obtained by Revenue under bilateral agreements –

This recommendation has been considered. These agreements are international treaties which are very precisely drawn as to the purpose for which information may be used and would not permit such transmission. However, if opportunities arise in the future, the Commissioners will consider the matter further. The Deputy will appreciate that Revenue is not in a position to comment on matters relating to individuals for reasons of taxpayer confidentiality.

Departmental Contracts Data

184. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of times his Department has engaged polling companies and-or Irish market researchers to conduct research on its behalf in each of the past two years; the names of such companies; the costs associated with same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29579/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the following table.

Year	Name of company	Amount	Purpose
2016	IPSOS MRBI	€27,060	A survey of Civil Service customers
2016	Perceptive Insight	€18,425	A survey of Civil Service business customers
2016	RED C	€28,290	Preparatory work on Gov.ie Portal
2016	Gartner	€127,428	Provision of research and analysis services to the OGP ICT portfolio
2017	IPSOS MRBI	€27,060	A survey of Civil Service customers
2017	Analysys Mason	€26,912	Provision of research and analysis services for the OGP's Mobile Voice and Data Services sourcing strategy to inform optimum approach to telecoms market for establishment of a central framework
2017	Gartner	€127,428	Provision of research and analysis services to the OGP ICT portfolio
2017	Coyne Research Associations Ltd	€36,300	Research into experience of engagement with the OGP among client Public Sector Bodies

* OGP – Office of Government Procurement

Office of Public Works Properties

185. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the position regarding an empty house (details supplied) in Dublin 7; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29583/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Commissioners of Public Works, on behalf of the State, manage a large and diverse property portfolio of over 2,500 properties. These range from office accommodation to heritage properties, visitor centres, Garda stations, among others.

In addition, there are a limited number of sundry residential dwellings that are intrinsic to the estates of parks and gardens as part of our National Historic Properties managed by the Office of Public Works. In general, these are allocated to staff in specific posts, such as Park Superintendents, Deer Keepers, etc. where there is a requirement for them to be present on the ground.

The property referred to is currently unoccupied due to its poor condition. It is hoped that as funds become available the OPW will commence refurbishment of the property, at which point a decision on its use will be considered in line with its particular location as part of the Phoenix Park estate.

Teacher Training Provision

186. **Deputy Michael Lowry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to ensure that all teachers have a basic understanding of administering adrenaline auto injectors in emergencies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29472/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department promotes the quality of teaching and learning through the provision of quality teacher training programmes and continuing professional development and support for principals and teachers in a range of pedagogical, curricular and educational areas. This is done through initial teacher education programmes, education centres and support services for teachers at primary and post-primary level.

Under the provisions of the Education Act 1998, the Board of Management is the body charged with the direct governance of a school.

The Board of Management of each school is responsible for the care and safety of all of the students in their school and care and safety should be at the centre of all policy and practices. Schools are required to take all reasonable precautions to provide training for teachers to ensure the safety and welfare of their pupils.

The Health and Safety Authority (HSA) advise that by law, employers and those who control workplaces to any extent must identify hazards in the workplaces under their control and assess the risk presented by the hazards.

Employers must write down the risks and what to do about them. This is known as Risk Assessment. The aim of Risk Assessment is to reduce the risk of injury and illness associated with work. The Risk Assessment(s) will form part of the employer's Safety Statement.

The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007 set out the First-Aid requirements for workplaces as follows: "Employers have a duty to provide first-aid equipment at all places at work where working conditions require it. Depending on the size or specific hazard (or both) of the place of work, trained occupational first-aiders must also be provided. Apart from some exceptions, first-aid rooms must be provided where appropriate. Information must also be provided to employees as regards the first-aid facilities and arrangements in place."

It is important that the school management authority requests parents to ensure that the school is made aware of any medical condition suffered by any student attending. Where the school is aware of potential difficulties that may arise as a consequence of a medical condition suffered by one or more students, it may be possible for the management authorities, working in conjunction with parents, teachers and children to put preventative measures in place to lessen

the possibility of any difficulties arising or to ensure that, if a student suffers from an illness requiring, for example, the administration of medication, that appropriate treatment is available.

The administration of medicines in primary schools is the subject of an agreement between the Irish National Teachers Organisation and the organisation representing school management at primary level. While this agreement specifies that no teacher can be required to administer medicine or drugs to pupils, it also sets out procedures that must be followed where a teacher or teachers agree to do so. The position is that either the parents of the child should make themselves available to administer medication as required, or where they wish the staff in the school to administer it, they should indemnify the school.

My Department cannot direct any member of the Board of Management or the teaching staff of the school to administer medical treatment to pupils, action and procedures which are normally carried out by medical professionals such as doctors and nurses.

The organisation of training in the administration of medicines is a matter for the Board of Management and my Department has no plans for future training programmes in this area.

Where a child requires adult assistance to assist in the administration of medicine and where the extent of assistance required would overly disrupt normal teaching time, SNA support may be allocated for this purpose.

It is a matter for the Board of Management to ensure that SNAs are in a position to effectively meet the care needs of students for whom SNA support has been allocated in the school when appointing an SNA.

Where specific training is required, the Board of Management should liaise with the Health Service Executive (HSE) in order to ensure that the HSE provides guidance and training that enables the SNA to meet the care needs of the pupil in an appropriate manner. It is a matter for individual school authorities to make such arrangements locally.

It is my Department's experience that once the matter has been discussed in detail with the Board of Management and staff of a school, and once all parties are clear as to the procedures to be followed, arrangements can normally be made to assist the administration of first aid or medicine.

In September 2016, I requested the NCSE to lead a comprehensive review of the Special Needs Assistant Scheme to identify and recommend how, in the future, the additional care needs of students, over and above those needs that could be reasonably expected to be managed by teaching staff, should be met and to identify and recommend the most appropriate form of support options to provide better outcomes for students with Special Educational Needs who have additional care needs, having regard to the significant amount of State investment in this area.

The administration of medication and other such issues in schools, were raised with the NCSE as part of the consultation process of this review.

The Comprehensive Review of the Special Needs Assistant Scheme was published by the NCSE on 30 May 2018 and my Department is developing proposals to implement the recommendations of the Review.

Apprenticeship Programmes

187. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason for the lack of capital expenditure on the printing apprenticeship programme. [29606/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): As the Deputy is aware, apprenticeship is a demand driven educational and training programme which aims to develop the skills of an apprentice in order to meet the needs of industry and the labour market. Consequently, the number of apprentices being registered is determined by employers in the sector.

Over the last number of years the number of employers registering apprentices to the craft of print media has significantly declined. Out of the 145 apprentices who were registered on the print media apprenticeship between 2006-2017 only 87 completed their apprenticeship and gained certification. Due to the low participation level, in September 2016 SOLAS suspended registrations in the print media programme and undertook to engage with the sector to see how the programme could be updated and made fit for future purpose.

I understand from SOLAS that in 2017 the Irish Printing Federation carried out a survey of the industry to ascertain the level of support for an apprenticeship on an ongoing basis. The findings from the survey indicated there was insufficient support from industry to sustain an apprenticeship in the sector. Engagement took place with SOLAS and the print media industry early in 2018. In light of this, SOLAS has paused the apprenticeship until such time as there is sufficient support from the sector. Any capital funding for the programme would be determined as part of this updating process.

Question No. 188 answered with Question No. 95.

Apprenticeship Programmes

189. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to remove apprenticeship fees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29387/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): An Annual Student Contribution is levied on all students attending Institutes of Technology (IoTs). Previously this Annual Student Contribution was paid by FÁS/SOLAS with apprentices themselves paying the part of the contribution relating to examination fees. As part of Budget 2014, SOLAS ceased making payments to IoTs and apprentices pay the full pro rata Annual Student Contribution.

The amount charged to apprentices is calculated on a pro rata basis of the time which they spend in IoTs during the academic year. This cost would typically be one third of the Annual Student Contribution paid by students attending for the full academic year, currently €3,000 and would amount to approximately €1,000 per student per period spent in the Institutes of Technology.

There are no plans to abolish the Annual Student Contribution for apprentices.

Student Grant Scheme

190. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to reduce the non-adjacent rate of the grant below the current 45 km; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29388/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The student maintenance grant is a contribution towards the living costs of a student. It is not intended to cover the full costs of attending college. The student grant scheme does however, provide for different levels of maintenance support, depending on means. Grants are also provided at adjacent and non-adjacent rates. The higher non-adjacent rates are intended to provide additional support to those students who may be living away from home.

Budget 2011 provided for a number of student grant measures which came into effect for the 2011/12 academic year, including the change in the assessment of the qualifying distance criterion for the non-adjacent rate of grant from 24 kilometres to 45 kilometres.

The 24km distance criterion was originally set in 1968 and had not been updated in more than 40 years. Since then, significant improvements have taken place in the road and rail network and it is considered that the revised distance criteria is more consistent with the type of distances that students may legitimately be expected to commute to college.

The current qualifying distance of 45km for the higher non-adjacent rate of student grant takes into account a reasonable radius within which students may commute on a daily basis.

Students in third-level institutions experiencing exceptional financial need can apply for support under the Student Assistance Fund. This Fund assists students, in a sensitive and compassionate manner, who might otherwise be unable to continue their third level studies due to their financial circumstances. Information on the fund is available through the Access Officer in the third level institution attended. This fund is administered on a confidential, discretionary basis.

Student Support Schemes

191. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if part-time and further education students will receive the same supports as full-time students in the same circumstances; if a hardship fund will be made available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29389/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-19 contains more than 30 actions that are intended to make higher education more representative of wider society. One of five goals in the plan is to assess the impact of current initiatives to support equity of access in Higher Education Institutions. These include the Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD) and the Student Assistance Fund (SAF), both of which are managed by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) on behalf of my Department.

The Student Assistance Fund was recently extended to part-time students in higher education following the allocation of an additional €1m in Budget 2017. The current SAF allocation for the 2017/18 academic year is €9.1 million.

The potential for reviewing other options for existing access funding initiatives to part-time studies in higher education and further education could only be considered in the context of the overall priorities and financial resources for access to higher and further education, and in the wider higher education funding context.

Special Educational Needs Staff Data

192. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated cost of employing an additional 450 resource teachers. [29445/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): DES Circulars 0013/2017 for primary schools and 0014/2017 for post primary schools set out details of the new model for allocating special education teachers to schools.

The revised allocation process replaces the previous generalised allocation processes combined with the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) allocation process which provided additional resource teaching supports to schools, to support pupils assessed as having Low Incidence disabilities.

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

No school, has lost supports as a result of the implementation of the new model.

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

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

The Government is committed to helping every child, particularly those with special educational needs, to fulfill their potential.

In 2018, my Department will invest over €1.75 billion in this area - 1/5 of my Department's budget and up 42% since 2011, at which point €1.24 billion was invested. This increased investment has allowed the Government to increase the number of:

- SNAs by 42%, from 10,575 in 2011 to 15,000 by the end of 2018.
- Special classes by 138% to over 1,300 at present, compared to 548 special classes in 2011.
- Special education teachers by 38% from 9,630 in 2011 to over 13,300 at present in 2018.

The estimated cost full year cost of employing an additional 450 special education teachers would be approximately €27 Million per annum.

Psychological Services

193. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the allocation provided for educational psychologists; and the estimated cost of employing a further ten, 20, 30, 40 and 50 educational psychologists, respectively. [29446/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy may be aware my Department's National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) provides educational psychological support to all primary and post-primary schools. This involves direct support in the event of a critical incident, access to national and regional support and development work to build school capacity to support students, access to a NEPS psychologist for responses

to queries arising, and access to individual pupil casework via a NEPS psychologist or through the Scheme for the Commissioning of Psychological Assessments. (SCPA).

Following on from an increase allowed in the 2017 Budget that the sanctioned number for NEPS psychologist stands at 184 whole-time equivalents of which some 179 w.t.e. posts are currently filled with 5 posts vacant due to on-going retirements and resignations, etc. within the Service. Even at this current level this represents the highest number of psychologists to be employed within NEPS since the inception of the service in 2000.

Additionally the Deputy may be aware that under the provisions of Budget 2018 I was pleased to announce that NEPS psychologist numbers will expand by a further 10 posts from the start of the new academic year.

I can inform the Deputy that a national recruitment competition is currently in operation by the Public Appointments Service in conjunction with my Department to replenish NEPS Regional Recruitment Panels to allow for both the filling of the abovementioned 5 vacancies and the expansion of NEPS number by a further 10 posts.

In answer to the Deputies specific question I can inform her that the average direct pay and non-pay cost per annum of engaging an individual Educational Psychologist is €73,000 per annum. The estimated annual additional cost, therefore, of employing the following numbers would be: 10 posts - €0.73m, 20 posts - €1.46m, 30 posts - €2.19m, 40 posts - €2.92m and 50 posts - €3.65m.

School Accommodation

194. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated cost of completing the prefab replacement scheme in one, two and five years, respectively. [29448/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that it is my Department's intention to replace purchased temporary accommodation with permanent accommodation, where the need is established, in the context of the long-term accommodation needs of each individual school, over the lifetime of my Department's 6 Year Capital Programme.

Such accommodation will be replaced as part of major building projects completed under the Department's construction programmes and under my Department's additional accommodation scheme. An enhanced additional funding provision of €180 million is being made available from 2019 to progress this initiative.

It is not possible to calculate a cost estimate taking into account the extent of applications, that the outlay for replacing temporary accommodation with permanent accommodation will vary from school to school depending on the extent and type of prefab unit, planning conditions and other site specific costs.

Information and Communications Technology

195. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the allocation being invested in information technology infrastructure. [29449/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In response to the Deputy's

question, in 2018, the funding allocated to Information Technology Infrastructure is outlined as follows.

Schools ICT Infrastructure Funding:

ICT grant to all Recognised Primary and Post Primary Schools for 2018 - €30 Million.

Schools Broadband programme for Primary and Post Primary schools 2018 - €15,715,139.

It is also worth noting that all new school buildings and school extension projects (where additional classroom accommodation is being delivered) receive an ICT Infrastructure grant per classroom. The value of the grant at primary level for existing schools, including special schools, is €5,000 per classroom. The value of the grant for new primary schools is €6,500 per classroom. At post-primary level grant values vary in accordance with room usages. This particular grant is issued by the Department's Planning and Building Unit as part of individual building projects.

Department of Education and Skills Internal IT Unit:

This funding is used to build and maintain ICT Systems and services for the Department's approximately 1,400 staff and its eGovernment systems.

The allocation in 2018 was:

Capital - €1,800,000

Current - €3,625,000.

Third Level Funding

196. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the allocation being invested in minor works and grants at third-level. [29450/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Out of an allocation of €10m for minor works and equipment renewal requirements that has recently been made available to Institutes of Technology, €5.890m of this allocation was paid out in 2017. The remainder will be taken from a total capital allocation of €30m that has been provided for investment in the higher education sector in 2018.

Speech and Language Therapy Staff

197. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of speech and language therapists employed; and the estimated cost of employing an additional 100. [29451/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that the provision of Therapy services, including Speech and Lanaguage Therapy services, is the responsibility of the Health Service Executive (HSE), under the Health Act 2004.

The Deputy will also be aware, however, that I recently announced that a demonstration project to provide in-school and pre-school therapy services will be introduced for the 2018/19 school year.

4 July 2018

The project will be managed and co-ordinated by the National Council for Special Education.

The model has been developed by the Departments of Education, Children and Youth Affairs, Health, and the Health Service Executive, and is part of the Government's overall aim to help every child to fulfil their full potential.

The purpose of the project is to test a model of tailored therapeutic supports that allows for early intervention in terms of providing speech and language and occupational therapy within 'educational settings'. This innovative pilot will complement existing HSE funded provision of essential therapy services.

The project is taking place in Community Healthcare Organisation (CHO) 7 Region of South West Dublin, Kildare and West Wicklow.

75 schools, including a representative sample of primary, post primary, and special schools will take part in the project.

75 Pre-school settings associated with primary schools participating in the project are being included in order to provide for therapy interventions to be made at the earliest possible time and to create linkages between pre-school and primary school provision.

The project aims to develop a more cohesive, collaborative approach to delivering supports to children by allowing therapists and educational professionals to work together in schools.

It is intended that 19 speech and language therapists and 12 Occupational Therapists will be recruited by the HSE to work with the 150 schools and pre-schools. The therapists will then be assigned to the NCSE to deploy to schools for the course of the project.

My Department therefore does not currently employ speech and language therapists, which continue to be employed by the HSE.

Questions in relation to the total number of speech and language therapists which are currently employed, and the estimated cost of employing an additional 100 posts, should therefore be referred to the Department of Health and the Health Service Executive.

Further Education and Training Programmes

198. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he is taking in respect of the back-to-education initiative, BTEI, conversion deal and the implementation of same in County Cork (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29459/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): A conversion process for staff employed in ETBs to deliver programmes under the BTEI was agreed between the Department of Education and Skills and the Teachers Union of Ireland (TUI) in May 2016.

Under the process, BTEI staff affected will be given the option of converting to a Teacher (qualified or unqualified), an Adult Educator or to remain as is. Following an analysis by the employing ETB, each employee will receive a letter setting out the personal implications for them in terms of working hours, salary and pension implications under each option, so that they can make an informed decision on which option they wish to choose.

This process is underway within ETBs and each individual ETB will manage the process on

behalf of staff that are in its employ. The Department has recently written to all ETBs, including Cork ETB, providing additional financial supports to each ETB to deal with a number of issues including the BTEI conversion process.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

199. **Deputy Michael Lowry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the decision not to allocate SNA hours at a school (details supplied) will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29463/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible 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.

In considering applications for SNA support for individual pupils, the NCSE 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.

My Department's policy is to ensure that every child who is assessed as needing SNA support will receive access to such support. In line with this policy, I announced in May 2018 that 800 additional SNAs 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.

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 support 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 a particular child, I have referred the question to the NCSE for their direct reply.

Departmental Legal Costs

200. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if all monetary compensation as a result of High Court orders against his Department have been paid to the persons involved; if not, when the payments will issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29465/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): There are no instances where monetary compensation as a result of High Court orders against the Department of Education and Skills have not been paid to the persons involved.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

201. **Deputy Michael Lowry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the decision not to allocate special needs assistant hours at a school (details supplied) will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29478/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible 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.

In considering applications for SNA supports for individual pupils, the NCSE 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.

The Department's policy is to ensure that every child who is assessed as needing SNA support will receive access to such support. In line with this policy, the Minister announced last month that 800 additional SNAs 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.

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 support 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.

In respect of a decision by a board of management or a person acting on behalf of a board of management to refuse to enrol a student in the school, an appeal may be made to the Secretary General of the Department of Education & Skills.

A completed Section 29 Appeals Application Form and a letter confirming the decision of the board of management must be submitted to:

Section 29 Appeals Administration Unit,

Department of Education and Skills,

Friar's Mill Road,

Mullingar,

County Westmeath.

N91 H30Y

The letter must be signed by a board of management member and the title of signatory must clearly state board of management membership or secretary to the board. The appeal should be submitted within 42 calendar days from the date the decision of the board of management was notified to the appellant.

As this question relates to a particular child, I have referred the question to the NCSE for their direct reply.

Teacher Training Provision

202. **Deputy Michael Lowry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to ensure that all teachers and special needs assistants receive training on administering EpiPen adrenaline auto-injectors in emergencies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29479/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department promotes the quality of teaching and learning through the provision of quality teacher training programmes and continuing professional development and support for principals and teachers in a range of pedagogical, curricular and educational areas. This is done through initial teacher education programmes, education centres and support services for teachers at primary and post-primary level.

Under the provisions of the Education Act 1998, the Board of Management is the body charged with the direct governance of a school.

The Board of Management of each school is responsible for the care and safety of all of the students in their school and care and safety should be at the centre of all policy and practices. Schools are required to take all reasonable precautions to provide training for teachers to ensure the safety and welfare of their pupils.

The Health and Safety Authority (HSA) advise that, by law, employers and those who control workplaces to any extent must identify hazards in the workplaces under their control and assess the risk presented by the hazards.

Employers must write down the risks and what to do about them. This is known as Risk Assessment. The aim of Risk Assessment is to reduce the risk of injury and illness associated with work. The Risk Assessment(s) will form part of the employer's Safety Statement.

The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007 set out the First-Aid requirements for workplaces as follows: "Employers have a duty to provide first-aid equipment at all places at work where working conditions require it. Depending on the size or specific hazard (or both) of the place of work, trained occupational first-aiders must also be provided. Apart from some exceptions, first-aid rooms must be provided where appropriate. Information must also be provided to employees as regards the first-aid facilities and arrangements in place."

It is important that the school management authority requests parents to ensure that the school is made aware of any medical condition suffered by any student attending. Where the school is aware of potential difficulties that may arise as a consequence of a medical condition suffered by one or more students, it may be possible for the management authorities, working in conjunction with parents, teachers and children, to put preventative measures in place to lessen the possibility of any difficulties arising or to ensure that, if a student suffers from an illness requiring, for example, the administration of medication, appropriate treatment is available.

The administration of medicines in primary schools is the subject of an agreement between the Irish National Teachers Organisation and the organisation representing school management at primary level. While this agreement specifies that no teacher can be required to administer medicine or drugs to pupils, it also sets out procedures that must be followed where a teacher or teachers agree to do so. The position is that either the parents of the child should make themselves available to administer medication as required, or where they wish the staff in the school to administer it, they should indemnify the school.

My Department cannot direct any member of the Board of Management or the teaching staff of the school to administer medical treatment to pupils, action and procedures which are normally carried out by medical professionals such as doctors and nurses.

The organisation of training in the administration of medicines is a matter for the Board of Management and my Department has no plans for future training programmes in this area.

Where a child requires adult assistance to assist in the administration of medicine and where the extent of assistance required would overly disrupt normal teaching time, SNA support may be allocated for this purpose.

It is a matter for the Board of Management to ensure that SNAs are in a position to effectively meet the care needs of students for whom SNA support has been allocated in the school when appointing an SNA.

Where specific training is required, the Board of Management should liaise with the Health Service Executive (HSE) in order to ensure that the HSE provides guidance and training that enable the SNA to meet the care needs of the pupil in an appropriate manner. It is a matter for individual school authorities to make such arrangements locally.

It is my Department's experience that once the matter has been discussed in detail with the Board of Management and staff of a school, and once all parties are clear as to the procedures to be followed, arrangements can normally be made to assist the administration of first aid or medicine.

In September 2016, I requested the NCSE to lead a comprehensive review of the Special Needs Assistant Scheme to identify and recommend how, in the future, the additional care

needs of students, over and above those needs that could be reasonably expected to be managed by teaching staff, should be met and to identify and recommend the most appropriate form of support options to provide better outcomes for students with Special Educational Needs who have additional care needs, having regard to the significant amount of State investment in this area.

The administration of medication and other such issues in schools was raised with the NCSE as part of the consultation process of this review.

The Comprehensive Review of the Special Needs Assistant Scheme was published by the NCSE on 30 May 2018 and my Department is developing proposals to implement the recommendations of the Review.

Minor Works Scheme Payments

203. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the payment of the minor works grant each year will be considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29493/18]

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

It is intended that the Minor Works Grant in respect of the 2018/2019 school year will issue no later than January 2019.

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

Capitation Grants

204. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an increase to the primary school capitation grant will be considered further to correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29502/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I recognise the need to improve capitation funding for schools having regard to the reductions that were necessary over recent years.

Restoring capitation funding as resources permit is one of the actions included in the Action Plan for Education and I remain committed to achieving this. However, I must be prudent in the context of ongoing budgetary pressures and prioritise where it is not possible to do everything that I would like to do in the education sector in any one year. In that regard it is critical that any additional resources that are available in the education sector are utilised in such a way as to maximise teaching and learning outcomes.

The Deputy will be aware that Budget 2018 marked the second year of major reinvestment

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

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

Teacher Training Provision

205. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to make training available for principal teachers on enactment of the schools admission legislation in view of the fact that these principals will have additional responsibilities in areas such as pupil enrolment under the legislation. [29506/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that the Education Admissions to School Bill, which is currently progressing through the Seanad, aims to provide a new framework for school enrolment that is designed to ensure that every child is treated fairly and that the way in which schools decide on applications for admission is structured, fair and transparent.

The approach taken, aims to strike the right balance between school autonomy and fairness in our education system.

In relation to the role of the school Principal, the Bill does not alter, but recognises the current position that it is the school Principal who normally implements the school's admission policy. The Bill also provides for regulations to be made in relation to a number of key aspects of school admission. In that regard, the Bill requires the Minister to consult with the education stakeholders, including management bodies and teacher unions, prior to the making of such regulations. Over and above the requirements of the Bill, the Department will also be consulting and engaging with both the IPPN and NAPD as representatives of primary and post-primary school Principals. This consultative process will help ensure that any concerns in relation to the implementation of the legislation can be taken account of and that the resulting regulations are as practical and straightforward as possible to operate for Principals, schools and for parents.

Schools Data

206. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of students on roll in the 20 smallest schools; if his Department takes responsibility to manage school amalgamations in circumstances in which enrolment trends are declining and unlikely to recover; and the steps he will take in this regard. [29507/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The position in relation to enrolments at the 20 smallest schools in the country, four of which are island schools, is set out in the table.

In respect of two of the schools listed, the Patron of the schools concerned has taken a deci-

sion to close the schools from the end of the 2017/18 school year.

In respect of a 3rd school, following engagement with the school's patron, approval has been granted by my Department to its amalgamation with another local school. A 4th school was established in September 2017 and it is anticipated that enrolments will increase. In respect of other schools listed, my Department will continue to engage with the Patron's of these schools where appropriate.

I can confirm to the Deputy that the decision making authority for school amalgamations belongs to the Patron/Trustees of a school, and this is subject to the approval of the Minister for Education and Skills. Any proposed changes involves extensive negotiations at local level and must be well planned and managed in a manner that accommodates the interests of students, parents, teachers, local communities and contributes to an inclusive education system.

The Programme for Partnership Government contains a commitment that no small school will close without the consent of parents.

Year	Roll no.	Name	Address	Address	Address	Address	Eircode	Enrolment per return
2017	13174H	ST COLUMBAS N.S.	INISH-TURK	CO GALWAY		Mayo	H91YNP3	2
2017	14111L	CROSS N S	KIL-RUSH	CO CLARE		Clare	V15TW83	2
2017	16817P	BRANNOXTOWN N S	BRANNOCKSTOWN	Naas	CO KILDARE	Kildare	W91NY67	2
2017	18100D	LISGRIFFIN N S	GOLEEN	SKIBBEREEN	CO CORK	Cork	P81XE40	2
2017	10568N	S N CUIBHREANN	CILL CHAOI	CO AN CHLAIR		Clare	V15RT73	3
2017	16630W	CEARA N S	BONNICONLON	BALLINA	CO MAYO	Mayo	F26E782	3
2017	16982H	S N ATH EASCRACH CHUAIN	BEALATHA NA SLUAGH	CO NA GAILLIMHE		Galway	H53FK35	4
2017	20502M	Scoil Sinead NS	Scoil Sinead Pelletstown	C/O ETNS Broombridge	Bannow Road	Dublin	D07TD93	4
2017	14865Q	KILLOCRANN N S	CASTLEHILL	BALLINA		Mayo	F26HF78	7
2017	18818E	S N NAOMH IOSAF	LEITIR	CASTLEBAR	CO MAYO	Mayo	F23RY60	8
2017	16173U	KINAFFE N S	SWINFORD	CO MAYO		Mayo	F12FW71	9
2017	16379R	VALLEY N S	DUGORT	ACHILL	CO MAYO	Mayo	F28HY27	9
2017	05348S	SCOIL EOIN	TAHILLA	SNEEM	CO. KERRY	Kerry	V93D735	10

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2017	12339I	S N INIS MEAD- HOIN	Inis Meáin	Oileann Árainn	Co. na Gaillimhe	Galway	H91P892	10
2017	15948C	CLO- LOGUE N S	CLO- LOGUE	CAMOLIN	ENNIS- CORTHY	Wexford	Y21NY10	10
2017	17365L	Two Mile Community National School	CILL AIRNE	CO CHI- ARRAI		Kerry	V93WD82	10
2017	04054T	BALLIN- DANGAN MIXED N S	Ballin- dangan	Mitch- elstown		Cork	P67EW90	11
2017	05164I	SCOIL NAOMH CHOLM- CILLE	OILEAN THORAI	AN BHUN BHIG	CO DHUN NA NGALL	Donegal	F92XV52	11
2017	11943S	BALLIN- LOUGH N S	BALLIN- LOUGH	CO ROSCOM- MON		Roscom- mon	F45RY86	11
2017	12633I	COOL- MEEN N S	COOL- MEEN	KILMUR- RY MC- MAHON	KILRUSH	Clare	V15KR50	11

State Examinations Data

207. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of persons required overall in recent years and to date in 2018 to correct papers and to assess projects in the State examinations; and the proportion of these persons who were registered teachers. [29508/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations.

In view of this I have forwarded your query to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply to you

Teacher Data

208. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of teachers who in the most recent years for which statistics are available were in receipt of a principal teacher's allowance throughout one school year and on the payroll but not in receipt of such an allowance in the subsequent school year; and if his attention has been drawn to evidence of greater numbers of principal teachers relinquishing their roles and links between this and increased regulatory and other administrative responsibilities. [29509/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Principal teachers are employed by the managerial authorities of their schools and the information required for their payment on payrolls operated by my Department is provided by them. The information is provided on standardised forms which are completed by authorized representatives in the school.

A Data Protection Privacy Statement is included on these forms. The Data Statement out-

lines that the main purpose for which my Department requires the personal data provided is the payment of wages. It is also required for the payment of pension at retirement.

The information is retained on databases to ensure the correct payment of the teaching staff paid by my Department and employed in the schools on an ongoing basis.

The information requested by the Deputy could only be obtained from these databases. A statistical analysis of the aggregated data requested for voluntary secondary community and comprehensive schools indicated that less than one per cent of individuals who continued in teaching were paid the allowance in one school year and not in the next.

Schools Mental Health Strategies

209. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he has taken to promote teacher well-being; and if such measures will be augmented in view of international concerns regarding the importance of teacher well-being to a high quality education service. [29510/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): An Occupational Health Strategy is in place as a supportive resource for teachers. The aim of this strategy is to promote the health of teachers in the workplace, with a focus primarily on prevention rather than cure. The Occupational Health Strategy comprises of the Employee Assistance & Wellbeing Programme (EAWP) and the Occupational Health Service (OHS) for teachers.

The EAWP is a free confidential service available to teachers and their immediate family members. It is accessible by means of a Freephone dedicated helpline which is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, providing counselling on a range of personal health and wellbeing issues given by qualified clinicians. Up to 6 face-to-face counselling sessions are available to provide supportive and solution-focused care based on an individual's clinical needs.

The OHS is in place to assist employers in carrying out their duty under Section 8 of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 to "ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the safety, health and welfare at work of his or her employees". In order to discharge these management responsibilities effectively and efficiently, it is essential that employers have access to professional occupational health advice on medical fitness for work. The OHS encompasses health management and incorporates pre-employment health assessments, sickness absence management referrals, medical assessments of fitness for work and ill health retirement assessments and appeals.

My Department regularly reviews the current Occupational Health Strategy with the partners in education to ensure best practice in early intervention and prevention for supporting positive occupational health and wellbeing.

Education and Training Provision

210. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the agreed apprentice school at a site (details supplied) in County Kildare; and the possibility of partnering the school with Carlow Institute of Technology. [29535/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): Further Education and Training (FET) provision, including apprenticeship training, is planned at a national level by SOLAS. Applications for funding for FET are made to SOLAS by Educa-

tion and Training Boards (ETBs) as part of the overall FET planning process. It is a matter for the management of each ETB to decide on the allocation of funding to FET programmes and to schools and colleges within their area.

As part of its role in providing further education and training options for learners in the region KWETB works closely with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, the local partnership, enterprise and Institutes of Technology (including Carlow) in relation to opportunities and progression routes for learners.

I understand from KWETB that while exploratory discussions took place between Kildare County Council (KCC) and KWETB in 2016 and 2017 no formal arrangements were agreed in relation to the Model School in Athy. KWETB have indicated that they would welcome a meeting with KCC to discuss the matter further.

Schools Building Projects Status

211. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the extension for a school (details supplied) in County Kildare. [29536/18]

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

I wish to inform the Deputy that the project is progressing to the architectural planning stage and is expected to be delivered by an external agency to my Department. Arrangements are currently being made in this regard and my Department will be in further contact with the school when these arrangements have been finalised.

Capitation Grants

212. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the capitation grant will be restored to €200 per pupil for primary schools; if this will be considered for budget 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29541/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I recognise the need to improve capitation funding for schools, including primary schools, having regard to the reductions that were necessary over recent years.

Restoring capitation funding as resources permit is one of the actions included in the Action Plan for Education and I remain committed to achieving this. However, I must be prudent in the context of ongoing budgetary pressures and prioritise where it is not possible to do everything that I would like to do in the education sector in any one year. In that regard it is critical that any additional resources that are available in the education sector are utilised in such a way as to maximise teaching and learning outcomes.

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

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

School Transport Provision

213. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a school bus for a school (details supplied) will be retained; if the situation will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29551/18]

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

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

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

Children are generally eligible for school transport if they satisfy the distance criteria and are attending their nearest school having regard to language and ethos.

Bus Éireann are currently processing applications for school transport services for the 2018/19 school year.

Families should liaise with their local Bus Éireann office regarding the operation of services and the availability of seats on these services.

Departmental Contracts Data

214. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of times his Department has engaged polling companies and-or Irish market researchers to conduct research on its behalf in each of the past two years; the names of such companies; the associated costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29572/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): For the Deputy's information, my Department has not engaged polling companies or Irish market researchers to conduct research on its behalf in either of the past two years.

Schools Building Projects Status

215. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the provision of new classrooms and resources at a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29590/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school referred to by the Deputy has submitted an application for additional accommodation.

My Department has requested additional information from the school and this is awaited. When received, the application will be considered further.

Third Level Funding

216. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the expert group's report, the Cassells report, on the funding of third level here; the work being undertaken in regard to the future funding of higher education expenditure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28986/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Expert Group's Report (Cassells Report) which was published in July 2016, clearly outlines the funding challenges in the higher education sector and offers a number of approaches and recommendations for consideration. As committed to in the Programme for Government, the report was referred to the Oireachtas Joint Committee for Education and Skills as part of the process for formulating a plan for the future of the sector.

The committee recently asked my Department to undertake an economic evaluation of the options presented in the Cassell's report to assist their consideration of the report. I have agreed to this request and my officials are currently scoping out what will be involved as part of the evaluation and the potential timescale. Following this evaluation I look forward to receiving the Committee's recommendations which will assist in facilitating informed decision-making for the future direction of policy and funding for higher education.

In the interim I am committed to investing in Higher Education through securing additional funding for the sector. This commitment is reflected in Budget 2017 and 2018 announcements in which the higher education sector was prioritised. In total, we will be investing more than €100m in higher education in 2018 than in 2016. We will look to continue this commitment to investment in higher education in 2019 and beyond. This additional funding will allow for targeted initiatives in higher education including skills programmes, performance and innovation funding, technological university development and apprenticeship costs in the sector. It will also allow for places to be provided for 2,100 additional students in 2018.

Furthermore as part of Budget 2018, the Government decided to raise the National Training Fund levy by 0.1% in 2018 to 0.8%, and by a further 0.1% in both 2019 and 2020 (subject to the reform of the NTF to make it more transparent and to afford employers greater opportunity to inform the NTF expenditure priorities). The increase in funding from the National Training Fund is a key strategic element of the overall funding increase for higher and further education. This measure will allow for an additional expenditure of €47.5 million this year as part of the Exchequer-Employer Funding Mechanism, bringing the total allocation for 2018 to €415m. It is estimated that the proposed increases to the levy in 2019 and 2020 will create additional fiscal space of a cumulative €104m in 2019 and €165m in 2020.

My Department and the HEA are further reforming the model by which higher education funding is allocated. An independent Expert Panel was appointed by the HEA in 2016 to review the current allocation model for funding higher education and to make recommendations on the most appropriate funding model for the future. The Review of the Allocation Model for Funding Higher Education Institutions was published on 15th January 2018. The reforms will link funding of higher education institutions to the delivery of key national priorities including

better alignment to skill needs of the economy, higher levels of performance and innovation, expansion of research; particularly with enterprise partners, the promotion of STEM provision, wider skills needs, and promoting access and lifelong learning. It provides a roadmap for transitioning towards a reformed funding model that is more transparent, consistent across higher education institutions, that incentivises actions in key strategic areas, and supports improved accountability while also respecting institutional autonomy.

An implementation group has been established which is comprised of representatives from DES, HEA, DPER, THEA & IUA. The Group are progressing a number of key priority recommendations for 2018 including the new Innovation and Performance Funds, the allocation of additional funding for HEIs with multi-campus provision that meet specific criteria, and a proposed new financial penalty for serious governance breaches. This comprehensive approach is being taken in order to contribute to the development of a long-term sustainable funding model for the sector. As such, it will be important to build broad political and societal consensus on achieving the most appropriate future funding model and the Department will continue to work to that end.

School Services Staff

217. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the employment situation of school secretaries employed by boards of management will be examined with reference to their pay and conditions and pension entitlements. [29625/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): To answer the Deputy, the majority of primary and voluntary secondary schools in the Free Education Scheme receive capitation grant assistance to provide for secretarial, caretaking and cleaning services. Capitation related grants are issued to the majority of primary and post-primary schools to employ such staff. Within the capitation grant schemes, it is a matter for each individual school to decide how best to apply the grant funding to suit its particular needs.

Where a school uses the capitation grant funding to employ a secretary, such staff are employees of individual schools. My Department has no plans to develop an alternative scheme for schools to employ primary school secretaries separate to the current system of capitation grant assistance.

Notwithstanding that, in 2015 my Department agreed to engage with the union side in relation to the pay of school secretaries (and caretakers) who are employed using grant funding, and to enter an arbitration process. The Arbitrator recommended a cumulative pay increase of 10% between 2016 and 2019 for school secretaries (and caretakers) comprehended by the terms of the arbitration process and that a minimum hourly pay rate of €13 for such staff be phased in over the period 2016 to 2019. Grant funding used by schools to fund the salaries of ancillary staff is also being improved on a phased basis between 2016 and 2019 following the arbitration process. These increases are in order to enable schools implement the arbitration outcome for grant funded secretaries (and caretakers).

In December 2017, my Department published circular letter 0078/2017 for primary schools and circular letter 0079/2017 for voluntary secondary schools, setting out the application of the third phase increases of the Arbitrator's recommendations. The circulars are available at:

Circular 0078/2017: https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0078_2017.pdf

Circular 0079/2017: <http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/>

cl0079_2017.pdf

The increases recommended by the Arbitrator are binding and must be applied by all schools who employ staff to whom the Arbitrator's recommendation applies.

Schools Site Acquisitions

218. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress in securing a site for a new three school campus in Buncrana, County Donegal; if additional valuation reports for the sites have been received which have been sanctioned; when the site acquisition process will be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29645/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware the project in respect of the education campus in Buncrana is included on my Department's capital programme.

My Department is working closely with Donegal County Council in relation to the proposed site acquisition. Unfortunately, the site acquisition process to date has been protracted due to technical challenges with identified site options and difficulties in reaching agreement with landowners.

A number of options are available to progress the site acquisition process, and a significant amount of work has been undertaken by both Council and Department officials in order to thoroughly appraise these in order to ensure Value for Money for the State. In the context of the identified options for progression, negotiations commenced with a landowner in respect of the preferred site option with a view to reaching agreement on mutually acceptable terms. These negotiations are currently underway and appear to be making progress.

Once the site acquisition is complete the project can progress to architectural planning stage.

Commissions of Inquiry

219. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 107 of 11 May 2017, the status of the bill of costs that has been submitted to the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse by each of the religious congregations; if the commission is now in a position to release this information; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29674/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse, established under the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse Act, is independent in the exercise of its functions.

I have been advised by the Commission that it is still not in a position to release the information sought by the Deputy. The Commission is still pursuing legal costs and disclosure, at this point in time, of any information in relation to the amounts billed by the various religious congregations could be prejudicial to the complex negotiations currently under way in relation to outstanding third party legal costs.

In its special report No 96 titled Cost of Child Abuse Inquiry and Redress released in December 2016, the Comptroller and Auditor General reported on the global figures relating to third party legal costs. The report may be of assistance to the Deputy and can be accessed at the following link: <http://www.audgen.gov.ie/viewdoc.asp?DocID=2503>

School Enrolments

220. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which primary and second level educational requirements are being met in Maynooth, County Kildare; if adequate provision in line with the requirements as set out by local management authorities is being met or is likely to be met having regard to the situation at the Maynooth educational campus; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29675/18]

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

additional classrooms, if required, for schools where an immediate enrolment need has been identified or where an additional teacher has been appointed.

My Department is liaising with Kildare & Wicklow Education and Training Board, to whom the campus project has been devolved for delivery, to ensure that both existing schools have the necessary accommodation to meet pupil needs pending the delivery of their new school buildings at Maynooth Education Campus.

The Deputy will also be aware that building projects for two primary schools in Maynooth are included on the 6 Year Construction Programme. In the case of Maynooth Educate Together National School, the project is at advanced architectural planning stage. The project is currently at tender stage, with construction anticipated to commence in Quarter 3, 2018.

The project for the new school for Maynooth Boys' National School is currently at Stage 2B of the Architectural Planning process – Detailed Design Stage.

Planning permission, fire certificate and disability access certificate for this project have been granted and my Department has recently authorised the project to proceed to pre-qualification of contractors.

My Department has written to the school outlining the projected timeframe for progression of this project to tender and construction stage and the steps involved. I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has set out on its website at www.education.ie - Building Works, the current status of building projects and this is updated regularly.

I also wish to advise the Deputy of my announcement in April regarding the establishment of 42 new schools, including a primary school in Maynooth, over the next four years (2019 to 2022).

This announcement follows nationwide demographic exercises carried out by the Department into the future need for primary and post-primary schools across the country and the 4-year horizon will enable increased lead-in times for planning and delivery of the necessary infrastructure.

School Enrolments

221. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which extra primary and-or second-level educational requirements are being met in Celbridge,

County Kildare, in line with that set out by local educational interests and-or the relevant section of his Department in respect of each of the existing primary and post-primary schools or their replacements; the schedule for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29676/18]

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

Projects in respect of three schools in Celbridge will be progressed under my Department's 6 Year Construction Programme. The acquisition of a suitable site is required to advance the projects and this process is currently in train.

I wish to advise the Deputy of my announcement in April regarding the establishment of 42 new schools over the next four years (2019 to 2022). This announcement follows nationwide demographic exercises carried out by the Department into the future need for primary and post-primary schools across the country and the 4-year horizon will enable increased lead-in times for planning and delivery of the necessary infrastructure.

I also wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has set out on its website at www.education.ie - Building Works, the current status of building projects and this is updated regularly.

School Enrolments

222. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which extra primary and-or second-level educational requirements are being met in Naas, County Kildare, in line with that set out by local educational interests and-or the relevant section of his Department in respect of each of the existing primary and post-primary schools or their replacements; the schedule for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29677/18]

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

The project at Naas Community College has been devolved for delivery to the local Education and Training Board (ETB). The ETB has indicated that the pre-qualification process for contractors for the project is currently underway. I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has set out on its website at www.education.ie - Building Works, the current status of building projects and this is updated regularly.

I also wish to advise the Deputy of my announcement in April regarding the establishment of 42 new schools, including a primary school in Naas, over the next four years (2019 to 2022). This announcement follows nationwide demographic exercises carried out by the Department into the future need for primary and post-primary schools across the country and the 4-year

horizon will enable increased lead-in times for planning and delivery of the necessary infrastructure.

School Enrolments

223. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which extra primary and-or second-level educational requirements are being met in Leixlip, County Kildare, in line with that set out by local educational interests and-or the relevant section of his Department in respect of each of the existing primary and post-primary schools or their replacements; the schedule for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29678/18]

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

I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has set out on its website at www.education.ie - Building Works, the current status of building projects and this is updated regularly.

I also wish to advise the Deputy of my announcement in April regarding the establishment of 42 new schools, including a new primary school in Leixlip, over the next four years (2019 to 2022). This announcement follows nationwide demographic exercises carried out by the Department into the future need for primary and post-primary schools across the country and the 4-year horizon will enable increased lead-in times for planning and delivery of the necessary infrastructure.

School Enrolments

224. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which extra primary and-or second-level educational requirements are being met in Clane, County Kildare, in line with that set out by local educational interests and-or the relevant section of his Department in respect of each of the existing primary and post-primary schools or their replacements; the schedule for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29679/18]

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

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

The Stage 2b submission has been reviewed by my Department and authorisation for the Pre- Qualification of Contractors issued on 15 May 2018. Pre-qualification normally takes between 8 and 12 weeks to complete. When pre-qualification is complete, the project will then be progressed to tender stage.

A letter issued in March 2018, to the school and its Design Team advising them of a time-frame for the progression of this project through to tender and construction. I also wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has set out on its website at *www.education.ie* - Building Works, the current status of building projects and this is updated regularly.

I wish to advise the Deputy of my announcement in April regarding the establishment of 42 new schools over the next four years (2019 to 2022). This announcement follows nationwide demographic exercises carried out by the Department into the future need for primary and post-primary schools across the country and the 4-year horizon will enable increased lead-in times for planning and delivery of the necessary infrastructure.

School Enrolments

225. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which extra primary and-or second-level educational requirements are being met in Kilcock, County Kildare, in line with that set out by local educational interests and-or the relevant section of his Department in respect of each of the existing primary and post-primary schools or their replacements; the schedule for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29680/18]

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

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

The Stage 2b submission has been reviewed by my Department and authorisation for the Pre-Qualification of Contractors issued in April 2018. Pre-qualification normally takes between 8 and 12 weeks to complete. When pre-qualification is complete the project will then be progressed to tender stage.

A letter issued in February 2018 from the Department to the school and its Design Team advising them of a timeframe for the progression of this project through to tender and construction. I also wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has set out on its website at *www.education.ie* - Building Works, the current status of building projects and this is updated regularly.

I also wish to advise the Deputy of my announcement in April regarding the establishment of 42 new schools over the next four years (2019 to 2022). This announcement follows nationwide demographic exercises carried out by the Department into the future need for primary and post-primary schools across the country and the 4-year horizon will enable increased lead-in times for planning and delivery of the necessary infrastructure.

School Enrolments

226. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which extra primary and-or second-level educational requirements are being met in Leixlip, County Kildare, in line with that set out by local educational interests and-or the relevant section of his Department in respect of each of the existing primary and post-primary schools or their replacements; the schedule for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29681/18]

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

I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has set out on its website at *www.education.ie* - Building Works, the current status of building projects and this is updated regularly.

I also wish to advise the Deputy of my recent announcement regarding the establishment of 42 new schools, including a new primary school in Leixlip, over the next four years (2019 to 2022). This announcement follows nationwide demographic exercises carried out by the Department into the future need for primary and post-primary schools across the country and the 4-year horizon will enable increased lead-in times for planning and delivery of the necessary infrastructure.

School Enrolments

227. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which extra primary educational requirements are being met in Timahoe, County Kildare, in line with that set out by local educational interests and-or the relevant section of his Department in respect of each of the existing primary schools or their replacements, the schedule for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29682/18]

232. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which extra primary educational requirements are being met in Tiermohan, County Kildare, in line with that set out by local educational interests and-or the relevant section of his Department in respect of each of the existing primary schools or their replacements; the schedule for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29687/18]

233. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which extra primary educational requirements are being met in Sallins, County Kildare, in line with that set out by local educational interests and-or the relevant section of his Department in respect of each of the existing primary schools or their replacements; the schedule for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29688/18]

235. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which extra primary educational requirements are being met in Clogherinkoe, County Kildare, in line with that set out by local educational interests and-or the relevant section of his Department in respect of each of the existing primary schools or their replacements; the schedule for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29690/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 227, 232, 233 and 235 together.

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

additional classrooms, if required, for schools where an immediate enrolment need has been identified or where an additional teacher has been appointed.

I wish to advise the Deputy of my announcement in April regarding the establishment of 42 new schools over the next four years (2019 to 2022). This announcement follows nationwide demographic exercises carried out by the Department into the future need for primary and post-primary schools across the country and the 4-year horizon will enable increased lead-in times for planning and delivery of the necessary infrastructure.

I also wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has set out on its website at *www.education.ie* - Building Works, the current status of building projects and this is updated regularly.

School Enrolments

228. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which extra primary educational requirements are being met in Newtown, County Kildare, in line with that set out by local educational interests and-or the relevant section of his Department in respect of each of the existing primary schools or their replacements; the schedule for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29683/18]

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

I wish to advise the Deputy of my announcement in April regarding the establishment of 42 new schools over the next four years (2019 to 2022). This announcement follows nationwide demographic exercises carried out by the Department into the future need for primary and post-primary schools across the country and the 4-year horizon will enable increased lead-in times for planning and delivery of the necessary infrastructure.

I also wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has set out on its website at *www.education.ie* - Building Works, the current status of building projects and this is updated regularly.

School Enrolments

229. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which extra primary educational requirements are being met in Johnstownbridge, County Kildare, in line with that set out by local educational interests and-or the relevant section of his Department in respect of each of the existing primary schools or their replacements; the schedule for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29684/18]

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

I wish to advise the Deputy that a project to provide a mainstream classroom and 3 special education teaching rooms has been completed at the primary school in Johnstownbridge.

I also wish to advise the Deputy of my announcement in April regarding the establishment of 42 new schools over the next four years (2019 to 2022). This announcement follows nationwide demographic exercises carried out by the Department into the future need for primary and post-primary schools across the country and the 4-year horizon will enable increased lead-in times for planning and delivery of the necessary infrastructure.

My Department has set out on its website at www.education.ie - Building Works, the current status of building projects and this is updated regularly.

School Enrolments

230. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which extra primary educational requirements are being met in Rathcoffey, County Kildare, in line with that set out by local educational interests and-or the relevant section of his Department in respect of each of the existing primary schools or their replacements; the schedule for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29685/18]

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

The Deputy will be aware of my announcement in April regarding the establishment of 42 new schools over the next four years (2019 to 2022). This announcement follows nationwide demographic exercises carried out by the Department into the future need for primary and post-primary schools across the country and the 4-year horizon will enable increased lead-in times for planning and delivery of the necessary infrastructure.

As the Deputy will also be aware, my Department approved a building project at Rathcoffey National School for the provision of two mainstream classrooms. The project has been devolved to the Board of Management for delivery and I understand that the project is currently

at planning permission stage. I also wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has set out on its website at *www.education.ie* - Building Works, the current status of building projects and this is updated regularly.

School Enrolments

231. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which extra primary educational requirements are being met in Straffan, County Kildare, in line with that set out by local educational interests and-or the relevant section of his Department in respect of each of the existing primary schools or their replacements; the schedule for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29686/18]

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

A project to provide four new classrooms has been approved to proceed to construction for Straffan National School under my Department's Additional Accommodation Scheme. The project has been devolved for delivery to the school authority.

I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has set out on its website at *www.education.ie* - Building Works, the current status of building projects and this is updated regularly.

I also wish to advise the Deputy of my announcement in April regarding the establishment of 42 new schools, including new schools in County Kildare, over the next four years (2019 to 2022). This announcement follows nationwide demographic exercises carried out by the Department into the future need for primary and post-primary schools across the country and the 4-year horizon will enable increased lead-in times for planning and delivery of the necessary infrastructure.

Questions Nos. 232 and 233 answered with Question No. 227.

School Enrolments

234. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which extra primary and or second-level educational requirements are being met in Prosperous, County Kildare, in line with that set out by local educational interests and-or the relevant section of his Department in respect of each of the existing primary and post-primary schools or their replacements; the schedule for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29689/18]

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

Kildare.

The Deputy will be aware that a building project for a post-primary in Prosperous is included in the Programme. A building project for a new post primary school catering for 1,000 pupils has recently been devolved to Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board for delivery. The ETB will now commence the procurement of the design team to progress this project. The Capital Programme also provides for devolved funding for additional classrooms, if required, for schools where an immediate enrolment need has been identified or where an additional teacher has been appointed. I also wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has set out on its website at www.education.ie - Building Works, the current status of building projects and this is updated regularly.

I also wish to advise the Deputy of my announcement in April regarding the establishment of 42 new schools over the next four years (2019 to 2022). This announcement follows nationwide demographic exercises carried out by the Department into the future need for primary and post-primary schools across the country and the 4-year horizon will enable increased lead-in times for planning and delivery of the necessary infrastructure.

Question No. 235 answered with Question No. 227.

Education Policy

236. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which he has examined a pre-budget submission presented by unions (details supplied) with a view to examining the extent to which he expects to be in a position to positively respond to the queries raised therein in the short to medium term; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29691/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I have set out the ambition to deliver the best education and training service in Europe by 2026. This Government has already made significant provision to support this ambition.

The mid-term capital review made provision for increased investment in my Department's School Capital Programme.

That Programme has been delivering an average of 18,000 school places per year in major projects and close to 8,000 per year in smaller scale additional accommodation. This building programme has allowed us meet the needs for extra places for an exceptional period of pupil growth at both primary and secondary level (up by over 100,000) and to expand provision of special education units in mainstream schools from 548 to 1304.

This programme has facilitated the employment of nearly 6,000 extra teachers and 3,000 SNAs in a three year period which has also seen two reductions in the primary pupil teacher ratio.

My Department is satisfied that the €8.4 billion capital investment in the National Development Plan (2018 to 2027) is sufficient to deliver the necessary school infrastructure. This is a 70% increase on the €4.9 billion in the previous 10 years (2008-2017).

I fully acknowledge the areas which the Deputy has referred to in his question are important for investment going forward and I will be competing at cabinet for funding in the next budget.

The Deputy will appreciate it would be premature to speculate what precise level of resourc-

es will be available across all Government departments or individual departments in advance of the budgetary process.

In recent years the Government has prioritised new, more modern school buildings; additional teachers; a lower pupil-teacher ratio; the introduction of new subjects at leaving certificate - physical education and computer science, for example; the restoration of funding to our universities. I will consider all budgetary submissions from the relevant education stakeholders.

Special Educational Needs Staff

237. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which he expects to be in a position to continue to ensure the availability of adequate special needs teaching places in all primary and secondary schools in County Kildare and throughout the country in the short to medium term; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29692/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): DES Circulars 0013/2017 for primary schools and 0014/2017 for post primary schools set out details of the new model for allocating special education teachers to schools.

The revised allocation process replaces the previous generalised allocation processes combined with the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) allocation process which provided additional resource teaching supports to schools, to support pupils assessed as having Low Incidence disabilities.

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

It ensures that all schools receive an allocation for special education teaching resources based on the schools profile.

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

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

The Government is committed to helping every child, particularly those with special educational needs, to fulfil their potential.

In 2018, my Department will invest over €1.78 billion in this area - 1/5 of my Department's budget and up 42% since 2011, at which point €1.24 billion was invested. This increased investment has allowed the Government to increase the number of:

- SNAs by 42%, from 10,575 in 2011 to 15,000 by the end of 2018.
- Special classes by 138% to over 1,300 at present, compared to 548 special classes in 2011.
- Special education teachers by 38% from 9,630 in 2011 to over 13,300 at present in 2018.

This level of commitment and provision, particularly in relation to the provision of additional special education teachers, will ensure that adequate special needs teaching resources can continue to be provided for all primary and secondary schools, including those in County Kildare, at present and in future.

Special Educational Needs Staff

238. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which he expects to be in a position to continue to ensure the availability of an adequate number of # SNAs in all primary and secondary schools in County Kildare and throughout the country in the short to medium term; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29693/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible 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.

In considering applications for SNA support for individual pupils, the NCSE 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.

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.

My Department's policy is to ensure that every child who is assessed as needing SNA support will receive access to such support. In line with this policy, I announced in May 2018 that 800 additional SNAs 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.

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 SNA allocation for County Kildare increased from 584.63 posts to 629.37 posts for the 2018/19 school year.

Schools Refurbishment

239. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which he expects to progress the school building improvement and summer scheme programmes in respect of all schools in County Kildare at primary and second level with particular reference to those schools that have made submissions in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29694/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department's Capital Programme (2016-2021) continues to address the challenges posed by the significant bulge in

pupil enrolments going through our schools. This has seen a significant expansion in the rate of provision of new school places. The Capital Programme details the school projects that are being progressed through the architectural planning process, including those schools in County Kildare. The Capital Programme also provides for devolved funding for additional classrooms, if required, for schools where an immediate enrolment need has been identified or where an additional teacher has been appointed.

I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has set out on its website at *www.education.ie* - Building Works, the current status of building projects and this is updated regularly.

I also wish to advise the Deputy of my announcement in April regarding the establishment of 42 new schools over the next four years (2019 to 2022). This announcement follows nationwide demographic exercises carried out by the Department into the future need for primary and post-primary schools across the country, including County Kildare and the 4-year horizon will enable increased lead-in times for planning and delivery of the necessary infrastructure.

In addition to the new schools announced, there will be a need for further school accommodation in other areas in the future. Based on the current analysis, this need can be addressed through either planned capacity increases in existing schools or additional accommodation or extensions to existing schools.

The Summer Works Scheme (SWS) is a multi-annual Scheme. Over 1,650 schools, nearly 50% of schools, applied for inclusion under the current round of the scheme which reflects a very high demand.

To date, almost €80 million has been approved under the current round of the Scheme, in respect of 635 school projects, 464 primary and 171 post-primary schools, for Gas, electrical upgrades, mechanical, sanitation and roof improvement works. Details of the successful school applicants, are published on the Department's website *www.education.ie*.

In relation to the SWS 2018, over €25 million will be spent on summer works projects in 2018. This expenditure will enable the remaining approved improvement works for 178 schools nationwide to be completed. These works will be carried out by the schools themselves on a devolved basis mainly over the summer months, so the disruption to students, teachers and other school staff will be kept to a minimum.

Furthermore, 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 SWS 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 SWS 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.

School Playgrounds

240. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which the requirements of a school (details supplied) regarding the resurfacing of a playground surface have been facilitated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29695/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm to the Deputy that the school in question applied for funding under the Summer Works Scheme, under Category 10 - External Environment Works to upgrade the school's play area.

The Summer Works Scheme (SWS) is a multi-annual Scheme. Over 1,650 schools, nearly 50% of schools, applied for inclusion under the current round of the scheme which reflects a very high demand.

Over 700 applications in Categories 7-10, at a cost of just over €52 million have not been reached to date. However, almost €80 million has been approved under the current round of the Scheme categories 1-6, in respect of 635 school projects, 464 primary and 171 post-primary schools, for gas, electrical upgrades, mechanical, sanitation and roof improvement works. Details of the successful school applicants, are published on the Department's website www.education.ie.

Furthermore, 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 SWS from 2019 onwards. While the SWS 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 SWS 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.

In the meantime, the school concerned may use its minor works grant, which all primary schools received last December, to carry out the works in full or on a phased basis as that grant permits if the school considers them to be a priority.

Schools Building Projects Status

241. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a school (details supplied); the additional progress that has been made since the matter was last raised with his Department; the timeline for the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29698/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The major building project referred to by the Deputy is currently at Stage 1 of the Architectural Planning Process which is the Preliminary Design Stage where the Design Team in conjunction with the school authority will analyse all the constraints of the site, develop a preferred design option and ensure that the preferred option is the best option for the delivery of the brief.

The Design Team has recently submitted a report which is being examined by my Department's Professional and Technical staff. A meeting date will be scheduled as soon as possible at which the Design Team will present its design proposals to the Department and the school will also attend.

On satisfactory completion of Stage 1 the project can be approved to progress through the remaining stages of architectural planning which includes detailed design, the planning application and other statutory approvals and the preparation of tender documents. This project was announced on the Minister's 6 year programme to go to construction 2019 - 2021.

Schools Building Projects Status

242. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a school building project (details supplied) in County Donegal; when the project will proceed to construction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29699/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The major building project for the school referred to by the Deputy is currently at an advanced stage of architectural planning Stage 2b (Detailed Design), which includes the application for statutory approvals and the preparation of tender documents.

The school and its design team was authorised to commence the prequalification process to select a shortlist of contractors for tender stage on 18th June 2018. Pre-qualification normally takes between 8 and 12 weeks to complete.

When pre-qualification is complete the project will then be progressed to tender stage. A tender stage normally takes between 7 and 8 months to complete. In that context, this school building project has been profiled to commence construction in Quarter 2 2019.

A letter issued from the Department to the school and its Design Team on 14th March 2018 outlining the projected timeframe for progression of this project to tender and construction stage and the steps involved.

Schools Building Projects Status

243. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a school building project (details supplied) in County Donegal; when the project is likely to proceed to construction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29701/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The major building project referred to by the Deputy is currently at Stage 1 of the Architectural Planning Process.

Stage 1 is the Preliminary Design Stage where the Design Team in conjunction with the school authority will analyse all the constraints of the site, develop a preferred design option and ensure that the preferred option is the best option for the delivery of the brief. The school's design team will present their design proposals to the school and the Department for approval.

The project will then progress through the remaining stages of architectural planning which includes detailed design, the planning application and other statutory approvals and the preparation of tender documents. This project is included in the 6 year construction programme and is scheduled therein to go to construction 2019 - 2021. When the design stages are completed and planning permission and the other statutory approvals have been secured my Department will be able to provide the school with a more definitive timeframe for the tender and construction stages of the project.

Apprenticeship Programmes

244. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of apprenticeship programme curriculum areas that commenced for the first time in 2016 and 2017; the reviews of these programmes that have been carried out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29702/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): The information requested by the Deputy is set out in a tabular statement.

The new apprenticeship programmes will be subject to the requirements for review stipulated in the validation process.

Consortia led apprenticeship new operational programmes

-	Cumulative operational programmes
2016	2
2017	9
2018 (to date)	11

Further Education and Training Programmes Eligibility

245. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the fact that there is an anomaly between eligibility criteria for progression routes in the PAC system when applying for higher diploma programmes as compared to the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection back to education system in respect of progression eligibility criteria; the steps that have been taken to address this inequality; the way in which he is advising persons when recruiting them to progression courses whilst still in their training programmes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29704/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): This matter is being considered by the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and I understand a response will issue to the Deputy.

Apprenticeship Programmes

246. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the fact that there are no college classroom places for apprenticeship plumbers and that they are obliged to remain out of education for one academic year; his plans to rectify the matter; the way in which he plans to ensure that they have the required taught hours component of their qualifications; the way in which he further plans to address the crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29706/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): 532 apprentices registered for the plumbing apprenticeship in 2017, which represents an increase of 54% on the 2016 intake. I understand from SOLAS that due to this increased level of interest it is taking some time to ensure training provision can match this demand. SOLAS has engaged with the Education & Training Boards (ETBs) and the Higher Education Authority (HEA) to increase training places in the ETB's and the Institutes of Technology (IOTs). By December 2018, up to 476 training places will be available in the ETB's and over 528 in the IOT's.

The minimum duration of the plumbing apprenticeship is four years, consisting of seven phases, each with a specific minimum duration in order to meet the certification requirements. There are 96 apprentice plumbers currently waiting for Phase 2 places with 21 waiting just over six months. These apprentices will receive a training place by October/November. Approximately 210 apprentices are waiting for Phase 4 and 6 training places, with 56 over six months waiting. 176 of these will be notified within the next month to commence their Phase 4 and Phase 6 training in September 2018. The remaining 34 apprentices will receive places in

January 2019.

SOLAS will continue to monitor training provision and monthly apprentice registrations to ensure that apprentices complete their apprenticeships within the minimum duration.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

247. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which he expects to be in a position to improve pupil-teacher ratio and class size in all primary schools in County Kildare and throughout the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29707/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Improvements to the staffing schedule at primary level in Budget 2016 and Budget 2018 brings the teacher allocation ratio to the most favourable ever seen at primary level. From this September, schools will operate on the basis of a general average of 1 classroom teacher for every 26 pupils with lower thresholds for DEIS Band 1 schools.

In the last two years, we have hired 5,000 additional new teachers and Budget 2018 provides for an additional 1280 teaching posts in the 2018/19 school year.

This budget measure delivers on a commitment made in the Confidence and Supply Agreement and Programme for Government to reduce primary schools class size.

Each 1 point adjustment to the primary staffing schedule is estimated to cost in the region of €16.5m per annum. Any additional improvement would have to be considered as part of the next annual budgetary process, alongside the many other demands from the education sector.

Emergency Accommodation Data

248. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the records that are kept of families that have had to seek emergency housing provision in Garda stations throughout the country in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29491/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The question of housing and provision of emergency housing is not within my remit as Minister for Justice and Equality.

My Department does not have a role in this matter and records such as those referred to by the Deputy are not held or maintained by the Department of Justice and Equality.

I am advised by the Garda authorities that neither are such records maintained by An Garda Síochána.

I am informed by An Garda Síochána that incidences in which a person or persons might avail of the cover of a Garda station, particularly during inclement weather, are dealt with by local Garda management or members on duty on a case-by-case basis, with the relevant State or voluntary (including non governmental organisation) agencies and authorities.

Gambling Legislation

249. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to introduce

legislation to enable problem gamblers to voluntarily self-exclude from locations in which gambling takes place as exists in other jurisdictions (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29519/18]

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

The Deputy will be aware that, Government, on 10 January, 2018, approved the updating of the 2013 General Scheme of the Gambling Control Bill. The proposed updating follows on from the review work undertaken in the Department of Justice and Equality and consultations with interested stakeholders. Changes to the Scheme will be subject to further consultations with the Office of the Attorney General and other relevant Departments.

The 2013 Scheme included a number of proposals that made provision for the protection of those who engage in gambling activities. Among these proposals was the establishment of a centralised self-exclusion register that would be maintained by the regulatory body proposed under the Scheme.

Allied to this work, and in the context of reviewing and updating the General Scheme in all necessary aspects, a Working Group, chaired by myself, comprising all stakeholder Departments, relevant Offices and the Office of the Attorney General has been meeting since February 2018. I expect the Group to submit its report to Government in early Autumn, with work on a revised General Scheme to follow thereafter.

My officials have engaged with counterparts in other EU jurisdictions where self exclusion measures are in place, with a view to the possible development of a proposal that would be feasible in an Irish context. However, I have to report that the creation, maintenance and effectiveness of such registers, even in jurisdictions where national identity cards are mandatory, has not necessarily been as effective as would have been hoped.

In Ireland, where we have over 800 bookmaker shops and significant on-course betting, the difficulties in enforcing the exclusion - self or otherwise - of any person would be difficult, particularly in the absence of an identity requirement via some form of authorised identity document.

Self-exclusion registers are likely to work best where the person concerned is gambling wholly on-line. However, it is common for gamblers to have multiple accounts with different operators.

You will appreciate the critical requirement of adherence to data protection legislation when developing proposals in this area.

One final point that is worth making is that no self-exclusion scheme is likely to work where the person concerned is not committed to their exclusion from gambling activities.

Tribunals of Inquiry Recommendations

250. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if all recommendations of the Moriarty tribunal have been implemented; the recommendations that are outstanding; and when they will be implemented. [29040/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, the Moriarty Tribunal made a number of recommendations which related to the responsibilities of different Government Departments. Insofar as my Department is concerned I can advise the Deputy that the recently enacted Criminal Justice (Corruption Offences) Act 2018 is

a very important piece of legislation in the fight against corruption both in Ireland and abroad. The Act was signed into law by the President on the 5th of June following swift passage through both Houses of the Oireachtas and represents a complete overhaul of anti-corruption offences in Ireland, which dated as far back as 1889 and were contained in seven different statutes.

The new Act provides a single, consolidated modern piece of legislation which is more comprehensive and more accessible. As well as being a consolidation, the Act is also responding to recommendations from the Mahon Tribunal, from GRECO, from the OECD Working Group on Bribery and from the UNCAC Implementation Review Mechanism.

I am also advised by An Garda Síochána that two separate investigations have been conducted by the Criminal Assets Bureau in relation to the Moriarty Tribunal as follows:

1. Investigation by Criminal Assets Bureau following referral of the final report of the Moriarty Tribunal by the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources to the Commissioner of An Garda Síochána in March 2011.

In March 2011, the Commissioner tasked the Criminal Assets Bureau with examining the report with a view to identifying any criminal offences that may require investigation by An Garda Síochána. The examination of the matter is continuing and a final report has not yet been completed.

2. Investigation by Criminal Assets Bureau in relation to alleged obstruction of the Moriarty Tribunal:

In July 2013 the Chairman of the Moriarty Tribunal made a complaint to the Garda Commissioner concerning alleged obstruction of the Tribunal. This matter was fully investigated by the Criminal Assets Bureau and an investigation file was submitted to the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, with directions received on 29 August 2017 that no prosecution was directed.

While I do of course appreciate public concern about these matters, the consideration of criminal investigations is clearly a matter for the Garda authorities, and the DPP to decide upon, independently, if any charges should be brought and I have no role in such matters.

Garda Data

251. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí based in County Louth by location; the number, rank and status of each station; if additional gardaí have been requested to man individual stations; the number requested; if requests for gardaí on probation were included; if the opening hours and manning of these stations increased; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29564/18]

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

I am informed by the Commissioner that in regard to the deployment of Garda personnel, a distribution model is used which takes into account all relevant factors including population, crime trends and the policing needs of each individual Garda Division. It is the responsibility

of the Divisional Officer to allocate personnel within his/her Division.

I am informed by the Commissioner that on 31 May 2018, the latest date for which figures are readily available, the strength of the Louth Division was 312. There are also 23 Garda Reserves and 31 civilians attached to the Division. When appropriate, the work of local Gardaí is supported by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Armed Support Units, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau.

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

I am informed by the Commissioner that since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, almost 2,000 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, of whom 76 members have been assigned to the Louth Division. Garda numbers, taking account of retirements, increased to 13,551 at the end of 2017 – a net increase of over 600 since the end of 2016.

I am pleased that funding is in place to maintain this high level of investment in the Garda workforce to ensure that the vision of an overall workforce of 21,000 by 2021 remains on track. This year a further 800 new Garda Recruits will enter the Garda College; some 400 of whom have already done so. In total, 800 Garda trainees are scheduled to attest during the year, 400 of whom have attested to date. Further, Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, are on track to reach 14,000 by the end of 2018.

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

This focus on investment in personnel is critical. We are now rebuilding the organisation and providing the Commissioner with the resources needed to deploy increasing numbers of Gardaí. Undoubtedly, the ongoing recruitment process will support all Garda activities and enhance visibility within our communities and will enable the Commissioner to provide additional resources across every Garda Division, including the Louth Division, as new Garda recruits continue to come on stream.

In so far as the allocation of newly attested Gardaí is concerned, this is a matter for the Commissioner. I am assured by the Commissioner that the needs of all Garda Divisions are fully considered when determining the allocation of resources. However, it is important to keep in mind that newly attested Gardaí have a further 16 months of practical and class-room based training to complete in order to receive their BA in Applied Policing. To ensure that they are properly supported and supervised and have opportunities to gain the breadth of policing experience required, the Commissioner's policy is to allocate them to specially designated training stations which have the required training and development structures and resources in place, including trained Garda tutors and access to a permanently appointed supervisory Sergeant who is thoroughly familiar with their responsibilities under the training programme. While not all Garda Stations are training stations it is important to note that the allocation of probationer Gardaí to a Divisional training station facilitates the reassignment of Gardaí to other stations within the Division, if required, by the Divisional Officer.

For the Deputy's information I have set out in tabular form the number for Gardaí assigned to the Louth Division by rank, on the 31 May 2018 the latest date for which figures are currently available and details of the Division's Garda Stations opening hours which are subject to the operational requirements of the Division.

STRENGTH OF THE LOUTH DIVISION BY RANK 31 MAY 2018

DISTRICT	STATION	GD	SG	IN	SU	CS	AC	TOTAL
ARDEE	ARDEE	21	5					26
	CASTLEBELLINGHAM	1	1					2
	COLLON	4	1					5
	LOUTH	1						1
	TOTAL	27	7					34
DROGHEDA	CLOUGHERHEAD	1	1					2
	DROGHEDA	89	13	1	1	1		105
	DUNLEER	5						5
	TOTAL	95	14	1	1	1		112
DUNDALK	BLACKROCK	3	1					4
	CARLINGFORD	3	1					4
	DRUMAD	6	1					7
	DUNDALK	124	19	1	1			145
	HACKBALLSCROSS	4						4
	OMEATH	2						2
	TOTAL	142	22	1	1			166
LOUTH TOTAL		264	43	2	2	1		312

Louth Garda Station Opening Hours			
Louth	Monday to Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Drogheda	24 Hrs	24 Hrs	24Hrs
Dunleer	10 am to 1 pm	10 am to 1 pm	12 pm to 1 pm
Clogherhead	10 am to 1 pm	10 am to 1 pm	12 pm to 1 pm
Dundalk	24 hrs	24 hrs	24 hrs
Blackrock	10 am to 1 pm	10 am to 1 pm	12 pm to 1 pm
Drumad			
Hackballscross			
Omeath	6 pm to 9 pm	6 pm to 9 pm	6 pm to 9 pm
Carlingford	10 am to 1 pm	10 am to 1 pm	12 pm to 1pm
Ardee (24 hr patrol)	12 pm to 5 pm & 9pm to 10 pm Mon, Tues & Wed. 3 pm to 5 pm Thurs. 9 pm to 10 pm Fri.	9 pm to 10 pm	Closed
Collon		10 am to 1 pm	12 pm to 1 pm
Louth Village		10 am to 1 pm	12 pm to 1 pm
Castlebellingham	No specific times. (Members supplement Ardee)		

Clogherhead opens on the above hours when non-core Unit C is on duty.

Due to ongoing checkpoints Drumad and Hackballscross are currently unable to open between 5pm and 8 pm

Departmental Contracts Data

252. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of times his Department has engaged polling companies and-or Irish market researchers to conduct research on its behalf in each of the past two years; the names of such companies; the costs associated with same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29578/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): In respect of the Deputy's question the following table outlines the number of occasions my Department has engaged polling companies and or Irish market researchers to conduct research on its behalf in each of the past two years, the names of such companies and the costs associated with same.

Year work undertaken (i.e. 2016 or 2017)	Name of Polling Company/Irish Market Researchers and brief explanation of work undertaken	Costs (incl. VAT)
2016	RED C Research & Marketing Ltd - Contribution towards the Irish National Election Study carried out following the 2016 General Election.	€23,497.50
2017	Coyne Research - Campaign evaluation and attitudinal research as part of the 'What would you do?' campaign on domestic and sexual violence.	€11,193
2017	Opinions.ie. - Website testing as part of the 'What would you do?' campaign on domestic and sexual violence.	€4,860

Crime Data

253. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of prosecutions in each of the past three years for driving without tax and insurance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29654/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have requested a report from An Garda Síochána in relation to the statistics sought by the Deputy and I will be in contact with the Deputy directly on receipt of this report.

Garda Investigations

254. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 109 of 25 April 2018, the status of the information requested; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29655/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Garda authorities that as part of the Garda Modernisation and Renewal Programme 2016 -2021, the Garda Commissioner provided for the review and restructuring of the Computer Crime

Investigation Unit (CCIU), originally a unit under the auspices of the Garda Bureau of Fraud Investigation, to establish a dedicated cybercrime bureau to ensure An Garda Síochána has the capacity and capabilities to deal with cyber-crime and cyber-security.

The Garda Cyber Crime Bureau (GCCB), under the direction of Detective Chief Superintendent, Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and Assistant Commissioner, Special Crime Operations, has responsibility for the forensic examination of all seized computer media, international liaison with regard to cyber matters and the investigation of cybercrime matters. Cases examined by the GCCB include all crime-types, in particular banking and financial crime matters, as well as the examination of equipment and media to assess images in the context of offences relating to child pornography and exploitation.

The Bureau is headed by a Detective Superintendent, who was appointed in August, 2016 and will be supported by two Detective Inspectors, with responsibility, respectively, for cyber-crime and for the forensic examination of computers and other media requiring examination as part of the investigative process.

There are currently 33 staff allocated to this unit, comprising of 1 Detective Superintendent, 1 Detective Inspector, 6 Detective Sergeants, 21 Detective Gardaí, (with one member on temporary allocation to another SCO Unit), 1 Higher Executive Officer, 1 Executive Officer and 2 Clerical Officers.

The continued roll out, on a phased basis, of Regional Triage units have been established in the Southern and South-Eastern Regions, at Ballincollig and New Ross Garda Stations. The triage model provides a tiered response and capability for computer forensic services on a Regional basis, utilising locally-based and trained first-responders and cyber triage specialists. The triage model also reduces demands on the central Bureau, while remaining under the supervision of D/Superintendent, Garda Cyber Crime Bureau. The triage units currently in place are subject of review to inform and establish best practices and processes for the establishment of further such units in other Regions.

I understand that the services being provided by the Bureau will also be assisted with the employment of specialist professional staff, in the area of computer forensics and analytics, in addition to which additional civilian support staff will be employed to support the administration and growth of the GCCB. The provision of additional resources, in terms of ICT, personnel and budget to the GCCB, is based on meeting the expressed business requirements of the section and, to date, has resulted in a reduction in the backlog of cases.

The following table shows the number of cases, relating to suspected child abuse, for which devices/media have been delivered to the Garda Cyber Crime Bureau and which await examination (cases are recorded by the Garda Cyber Crime Bureau on the date the device is submitted to the Bureau for examination).

Year	No. of Cases
2018	39
2017	92
2016	33
2015	1

Data provided is operational, provisional and liable to change and is valid from the 23 April 2018.

Work Permits Applications

255. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the status of an application for a work permit by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29452/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Employment Permits Section of my Department informs me that an application for a Critical Skills Employment Permit for the person concerned was received on 11th June 2018.

The Employment Permits Section is currently processing standard applications received on 3rd April 2018 and this application should be considered in the next ten weeks.

Work Permits Eligibility

256. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to standardise and register home care workers in cases in which all carers are documented and regularised in their immigration status for the home care industry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29488/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): At my request, my Department is currently conducting a review of economic migration policies underpinning the current employment permits system to ensure that our policies are fully supportive of Ireland's emerging labour market needs, be they skills or labour shortages in certain sectors. The review is on schedule for completion with a full report due in the coming weeks. Following on from that Report, it is expected that a review of the lists of occupations for employment permits will be conducted in the second half of this year.

Where specific skills prove difficult to source within the State and wider EEA, an employment permit may be sought by an employer to hire a non-EEA national. The employment permits system is managed in part through the operation of the highly skilled and ineligible occupation lists for the purpose of grant of employment permits.

Changes to access to the Irish labour market for specific occupations via the employment permits system are made on the basis of research undertaken by the Expert Group of Future Skills Needs and, coordinated by the National Skills Council, the annual National Skills Bulletin and the annual Vacancy Overview Report in tandem with a public consultation process.

Care workers are currently included on the Ineligible Categories of Employment List (ICEL). In order to remove a skill from this list, there would need to be a clear demonstration that recruitment difficulties are solely due to shortages across the EEA and not to other factors such as salary and/or employment conditions. Organisations in the sector would need to provide the necessary data to substantiate their claims. A detailed evidence-based case for removal of care workers from the ineligible list, based on this detailed data would then need to be put forward by the Department of Health, as the lead Department for the sector, to my Department for review and consideration.

I am aware that my colleague, Minister of State Daly, with special responsibility for Older People, has had various meetings with the nursing home sector and I understand Minister Daly is willing to work with the industry to ensure continuity of service in the best interests of residents.

The establishment of national standards and a register for home care workers would be the

responsibility of the Department of Health.

Industrial Relations

257. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if her Department will investigate the colleague representative committee in a company (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29520/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): The dispute at the company referred to by the deputy relates to certain terms and conditions of employment, including that of pay and contractual security which a trade union is seeking to negotiate on behalf of its members.

As the deputy will be aware, Ireland operates a system of industrial relations that is voluntary in nature under which responsibility for the resolution of industrial disputes between employers and workers rests in the first instance with the employer, the workers and their representatives. For its part, the State provides the industrial relations dispute settlement mechanisms to support parties in their efforts to resolve their differences.

Under Irish law, as established in case law, it is not mandatory for employers to recognize trade unions. I understand that the company in question has indicated that it has in place a mechanism for direct engagement with staff through an internal representative committee. It should be noted that internal representative committees are not trade unions and as such are not required to hold a negotiating licence or to be registered with the Registrar of Friendly Societies.

It has been the consistent policy of successive Irish Governments to support the development of an institutional framework supportive of a voluntary system of industrial relations that is premised upon freedom of contract and freedom of association. An extensive range of statutory provisions have been put in place to provide the legislative support for such a framework.

The most recent legislation to facilitate this is the Industrial Relations (Amendment) Act 2015 that came into effect on 1 August 2015. This Act provides a clear and balanced mechanism by which the fairness of the employment conditions of workers in their totality can be assessed in employments where collective bargaining does not take place.

This legislation was the culmination of an extensive consultation process with stakeholders at the time, including the issue of employees' rights to engage in collective bargaining. The legislation took account of relevant European Court of Human Rights jurisprudence, as well as the conclusions and recommendations of the ILO in its consideration of a complaint by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions against the Government in the context of ILO Convention 98 to which the deputy refers.

The 2015 Act makes provision, in instances where employers engage in collective bargaining with an 'internal excepted body' as opposed to a trade union, for a referral to be made to the Labour Court to establish if internal bargaining bodies are genuinely independent of their employer. This is a role that under the legislation is vested in the Labour Court and as Minister, I have no role in this regard.

Tribunals of Inquiry Recommendations

258. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation

if all recommendations of the Moriarty tribunal have been implemented; the recommendations that are outstanding; and when they will be implemented. [29040/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Moriarty Tribunal made a number of recommendations which relate to the responsibilities of a number of Departments.

With regard to matters that fall under my Department's responsibility, the Moriarty Tribunal made two recommendations for changes to company law, as follows:

- That a provision similar to section 172 of the UK Companies Act, 2006 be adopted, together with the adoption of additional implementation or enforcement measures.

- That consideration be given by the Oireachtas, and/or by the Company Law Review Group, to enacting provisions similar to those contained in Part 14 of the UK Companies Act, 2006, governing the control of political donations and expenditure.

The Government considered that provisions contained in Part 5 of the Companies Act, 2014 meet the objectives of the first recommendation. Part 5 introduces, for the first time in codified form, the various common law and statutory duties of company officers. The Companies Act, 2014 was signed into law by President Higgins on 23 December 2014 and it commenced on 1 June 2015.

With regard to the second recommendation above, provisions restricting corporate donations are contained in the Electoral Amendment (Political Funding) Act 2012, which comes within the remit of the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government.

Departmental Contracts Data

259. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of times her Department has engaged polling companies and-or Irish market researchers to conduct research on its behalf in each of the past two years; the names of such companies; the costs associated with same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29567/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Details of contracts that my Department has signed with polling companies and market research companies in 2016 and 2017 are set out in the table.

Year	Name of Company	Purpose of expenditure	Cost €
2016	Coyne Research	Design of customer survey	€13,776
2016	Behaviour and Attitudes	Survey of Irish SMEs views on Brexit	€52,250
2017	Behaviour and Attitudes	Survey on impact of Brexit on SMEs and their capital funding	€25,000
2017	Coyne Research	Design and implementation of customer survey	€10,332

Economic Competitiveness

260. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the unit within her Department that co-ordinates a cross-departmental response to the national competitiveness report. [29352/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The National Competitiveness Council (NCC) reports to the Taoiseach and the Government, through the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, on key competitiveness issues facing the Irish economy and offers recommendations on policy actions required to enhance Ireland's competitiveness position. The secretariat to the NCC is provided by my Department.

The Council annually publishes its recommendations on policy actions required to enhance Ireland's competitiveness in its Competitiveness Challenge Report. As part of this report, the Council provides updates on the issues identified as areas of concern in previous reports. These reports are presented to Government and it is the responsibility of each Government Department to consider and progress the Council's recommendations as appropriate.

Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland

261. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health if he is satisfied that all fitness-to-practise inquiries by An Bord Altranais were carried out in full accordance with the rules and procedures as set out in the various Acts governing the board; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29466/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland (NMBI) is a statutory agency with responsibility for conducting fitness to practise inquiries in accordance with the provisions of the Nurses and Midwives Act 2011 and, where appropriate, the Nurses Act, 1985.

The NMBI assures me that it carries out all fitness to practise inquiries in accordance with the relevant legislative requirements.

Medical Aids and Appliances Expenditure

262. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the amount the HSE spent on wheelchairs in 2017; if the HSE will consider repairing wheelchairs rather than offering new chairs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29442/18]

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

Health Services Data

263. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons diagnosed with dementia in County Louth and east County Meath; the existing services for persons with dementia in County Louth and east County Meath; the location of existing services; the number of persons availing of these services; his plans for the expansion of these services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29443/18]

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

264. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Health his plans to deliver mental health services for behavioural therapy and, in particular, dialectical behaviour therapy in County Clare. [29444/18]

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.

Air Ambulance Service Provision

265. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health the status of the provision of an air ambulance service in County Cork; if general practitioners have submitted a proposal in regard to same; his views on the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29460/18]

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

Ambulance Service Data

266. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health the number of ambulances in County Cork; the status of fleet replacement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29461/18]

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

National LGBTI Strategy

267. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health the policy in respect of persons who have intersexual children. [29462/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): I understand the HSE is committed to developing an LGBTI+ Health Strategy this year and it is likely that intersexual children will be referenced in this Strategy.

Home Care Packages

268. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Health his plans to standardise and register home care workers in cases involving carers who are documented and regularised in their immigration status for the home care industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29464/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): Immigration policy is not within the remit of the Minister for Health.

The Department of Health is currently engaged in the development of a new statutory home-care scheme and a system of regulation for home-care services. This is a complex process and a significant amount of preparatory work remains to be undertaken before decisions are reached on the form of the home-care scheme and the system of regulation. However, the process will

consider, amongst other issues, workforce planning and regulatory matters including the registration of providers, training for care-workers and national quality standards.

HSE Expenditure

269. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the amount the HSE spent on crutches in 2017; the reason it does not take back used crutches when a patient wishes to return them; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29470/18]

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

Health Promotion

270. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health when the report relating to the healthy workplaces consultation process will be finalised, available and published; the amount allocated through the healthy workplace initiative to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29476/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): The development of a National Framework for Healthy Workplaces is progressing under the Healthy Ireland agenda and is overseen by a sub-group co-chaired by the Department of Health and the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation. This work primarily involves development of a framework across both the public and private sectors to encourage and support the development of Health and Wellbeing programmes in all places of employment.

The objective is to support employers to develop individual, practical plans identifying how they will protect and promote the physical, mental and social wellbeing of their employees, within the context of their own size, sector, location, number of employees, etc.

A comprehensive consultation process has been undertaken to inform the development of the Framework. The consultation report and a literature review have been completed and will be published and made available with the draft Framework which is expected to be completed by the end of 2018.

A total of approx. €22,000 has been spent on the development of the Framework from within the budget of the Department of Health to date.

The Deputy may also be interested to note that a new Post Graduate Course on Workplace Wellness at the National University of Galway (NUIG), which was jointly funded by both Departments, has now been introduced. This is an important step in building capacity towards the future provision of training and services in the area of Workplace Wellbeing. The course, with 35 participants, will be available again for the academic year 2018/19.

Proposed Legislation

271. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health when the Bill to legislate for access to abortion here will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29481/18]

272. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the legal advice he has received on the publication of the legislation to allow for abortion here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29482/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 271 and 272 together.

The Thirty-Sixth Amendment of the Constitution Bill 2018 seeks to delete Article 40.3.3 of the Constitution and substitute it with wording confirming that the Oireachtas may make laws for the regulation of the termination of pregnancy. A Polling Day Order for a referendum was held on 25 May 2018 and the referendum was passed by a substantial majority. A certificate with the provisional result of the referendum was published in *Iris Oifigiúil* on 29 May.

Two applications for permission to challenge the result of the referendum have been made to the High Court under section 42 of the Referendum Act 1994. The High Court began to hear the applications on Tuesday, 26 June and concluded on Friday, 29 June. Judgement on the applications have been reserved.

When there is a referendum petition outstanding, the referendum certificate remains provisional and the Thirty-sixth Amendment of the Constitution Bill 2018 cannot be signed into law by the President. Therefore the Bill to expand the grounds for legal termination of pregnancy cannot be published in the Houses of the Oireachtas while article 40.3.3 remains unchanged in the Constitution.

However, work is ongoing on the preparation of the legislation to regulate termination of pregnancy based on the General Scheme of a Bill to Regulate Termination of Pregnancy approved by Government on 27 March and published on Department of Health website.

Treatment Abroad Scheme

273. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if breast reduction surgery on medical grounds and supported by a consultant's letter is available under the treatment abroad scheme and-or the cross-border healthcare directive; the procedure for a person to access treatment under these schemes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29485/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Patients can seek to access health care in an other EU/EEA member state via two different schemes. Where a service is provided in Ireland but a patient wishes to access care in another EU/EEA Member State, this can be possible by seeking treatment under the Directive on Patients' Rights in Cross Border Healthcare, otherwise known as the Cross Border Directive (CBD).

The CBD provides rules for the reimbursements to patients of the cost of receiving treatment abroad, where the patient would be entitled to such treatment in their home Member State, and supplements the rights that patients already have at EU level. Patients may access the healthcare they require in either the public or private healthcare system of another Member State under the CBD. Access to healthcare abroad is based on patients following public patient pathways, i.e. they must demonstrate they have followed the equivalent public patient pathways that a patient would follow if accessing public healthcare in Ireland. It is important to note that reimbursement is confined to the costs of the care itself and that the rates of reimbursement cannot exceed the cost of provision of the care if it were provided in the Irish public health service.

Certain health services, e.g. services of public health, long term care, organ transplantation, etc. are excluded under the CBD.

The HSE operates the CBD in Ireland. Referral for care under the CBD may be made by a GP, a hospital consultant and certain other clinicians. In line with practice in other EU Member States, the HSE through the National Contact Point (NCP) provides information for patients on the CBD on its website which can be accessed at:

hse.ie/eng/services/list/1/schemes/cbd/ and also by phone at 056 7784551. The HSE advises where a patient is in any doubt as to the need to seek prior authorization before availing of a consultation or treatment abroad to contact the NCP.

The HSE also operates the Treatment Abroad Scheme (TAS) for persons entitled to treatment in another EU/EEA Member State or Switzerland under EU Regulation (EC) No. 883/2004, as per the procedures set out in EU Regulations (EC) No. 987/2009. The TAS provides for the cost of approved treatments in another EU/EEA member state or Switzerland through the issue of form E112 (IE) where the treatment is:

- Among the benefits provided for by Irish legislation;
- Not available in Ireland; and
- Not available within the time normally necessary for obtaining it in Ireland, taking account of the patient's current state of health and the probable course of the disease.

GPs refer patients to consultants for acute care and it is the treating consultant who, having exhausted all treatment options including tertiary care within the country, refers the patient abroad under the terms of the TAS. The consultant must specify the specific treatment and in making the referral accepts clinical responsibility in relation to the physician and facility abroad where the patient will attend.

Each application is reviewed individually and a decision is made in accordance with the legislation and guidelines and on the basis of a review by clinical experts. Each application is given a formal written decision and where a decision is one of decline, the reason for that decision is clearly outlined and the option of an appeal is afforded. Previous approvals or declines are not used as an influencing factor on subsequent applications. The appeals process is outlined in each decline letter without exception. Where on appeal a decline decision is upheld, the appeal decision letter advises that the applicant can make a further appeal to the Office of the Ombudsman. Full details on the scheme can be found on the HSE website at: hse.ie/treatmentabroadscheme.

Home Help Service Data

274. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health the reason for staff shortages in home help support staff in Cork city and county; the number of home help support staff employed by the HSE in Cork city and county; the number of staff engaged in administration activities for home help support staff; and the funding allocated to the division. [29489/18]

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.

Proposed Legislation

275. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if the forthcoming legislation to

enact Parts 2 and 3 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 will be drafted to include parents who have conceived through artificial insemination at home and same-sex male couples; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29495/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 reforms and updates family law to address the needs of children living in diverse family types and the commencement of Parts 2 & 3 of the Act is the responsibility of the Minister for Health. During the preparation of regulations to facilitate the commencement of Parts 2 & 3 of the Act a number of technical drafting issues came to light that required amendments to the Act of 2015 through primary legislation.

I received Government approval on Tuesday 26 of June to draft an amendment Bill to remedy these defects in the Act of 2015. I hope to be in a position to introduce this legislation into the Dail as soon as possible and commence Parts 2 & 3 of the Children and Family Relationships Act in the autumn.

The Children and Family Relationships Act specifically relates to procedures where the intending mother is also the birth mother. As such this Act does not encompass surrogacy. Provisions relating to the regulation of surrogacy are included in Part 6 of the General Scheme of the Assisted Human Reproduction Bill 2017.

The Government approved the drafting of a Bill on assisted human reproduction (AHR) and associated areas of research, which will be based on the published General Scheme, in October last year. Officials in my Department are engaging with the Office of the Attorney General in relation to the process of drafting this Bill. The General Scheme is published on my Department's website and the Joint Committee on Health is currently conducting a review of the General Scheme of the Assisted Human Reproduction Bill 2017 as part of the pre-legislative scrutiny process, which began in January of this year.

Disabilities Data

276. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of appeals handled by the disability appeals officer in 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018 regarding assessments of needs; the number of determinations made against the complaints officer to remedy the applicants grievances regarding assessments of needs in 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29499/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Disability Appeals Officer received 118 appeal applications in 2016 with 12 applications carried over from 2015. In 2017 there were 61 new applications received, 48 cases were carried over from 2016 giving a total of 109 to be processed. In 2016, 65 determinations issued 64 of which were upheld in favour of the appellant. In 2017 84 determinations were made, 82 of which were upheld in favour of the appellant.

To date in 2018 69 new applications have been received by the Disability Appeals Officer and 37 determinations have issued.

The majority of the appeals received relate to delays in the completion of the Assessment of Need process by the HSE.

Medical Card Eligibility

277. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if the medical card scheme will be extended to cover all long-term illnesses which require ongoing care and ensure patients with these illnesses have an automatic entitlement to a medical card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29503/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE's Expert Group on Medical Need and Medical Card Eligibility examined the issue of awarding medical cards on the basis of illness and concluded that it was not feasible, desirable, nor ethically justifiable to list medical conditions in priority order for medical card eligibility. The Expert Group also concluded that a person's means should remain the main qualifier for a medical card. This position remains unchanged.

Medical card provision is based on financial assessment. In accordance with the provisions of the Health Act 1970 (as amended), eligibility for a medical card is determined by the HSE. The Act obliges the HSE to assess whether a person is unable, without due hardship, to arrange general practitioner services for himself or herself and his or her family, having regard to his or her overall financial position and reasonable expenditure and every application must be assessed on that basis. Under the legislation, having a particular illness, in itself, does not establish eligibility for a medical card and therefore, the medical conditions of applicants for this scheme are not monitored on that basis. Where the applicant's income is within the income guidelines, a medical card or GP visit card will be awarded.

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

Home Care Packages

278. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the improvements he plans in the home care system; his views on whether substantial investment in the system is required to supply the level of home care necessary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29505/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): In advancement of the Government's commitment to promote community-care so that people can continue to live independently in their own homes for as long as possible, the Department of Health is currently engaged in the development of a new, stand-alone statutory scheme and system of regulation for home-care services.

The new home-care scheme will introduce clear rules in relation to the services for which individuals are eligible and in relation to service-allocation. It will therefore be an important step in ensuring that the system operates in a consistent and fair manner and will help to improve access to home-care services on an affordable and sustainable basis. The introduction of a system of regulation for home-care will help to ensure public confidence in the services provided. The new scheme will also be designed to support family/unpaid carers and will

complement and integrate effectively with other health and social-care services such as long-term residential care (including the Nursing Homes Support Scheme), primary and community services and hospital services.

The development of a statutory scheme for home-care is a complex process. A significant amount of preparatory work remains to be undertaken before decisions are reached on the form of the scheme and the system of regulation. This is required if reforms are to be successful, affordable and sustainable. Every effort is being made to advance this work as quickly as possible.

While the new home-care scheme is under development, the Department of Health and Health Service Executive are continuing efforts to improve existing home-care services. In 2018 the HSE brought the funding for Home Help and Home Care Packages together into a single Home Support Service for older people. As well as simplifying the application-process for home-care, the new service will be more responsive to service-users' changing needs. More broadly the HSE will continue to encourage local integration of services and to build appropriate care-pathways, in particular for people with complex needs. A consumer-directed approach to home-support provision will be introduced, giving service-users greater choice in relation to when they receive services and their selection of a service-provider.

In line with the commitment in A Programme for a Partnership Government (2016) to increase funding for home-care annually, funding for Older Persons' Services rose from €763m in 2017 to €811m in 2018, including approximately €417m for the provision of home-support services. The HSE's National Service Plan 2018 provides for a target of 17.094m home-support hours to be provided to 50,500 people, which compares with 16.34m hours delivered to 50,000 people in 2017. A further 156,000 hours, relating to adverse weather funding, will be provided in 2018. A target of 360,000 home-support hours for people with complex needs will be provided through 235 Intensive HCPs.

Despite this significant level of service-provision, the demand for home-support continues to grow. It is important to note that, although the funding for home-support across the system is significant, it is finite, restricting service-supply. At end of March 6,458 people were waiting for new or additional supports following assessment. All those waiting are provided with a service as soon as possible on the basis of their assessed needs, with priority given to those awaiting discharge from acute hospitals.

The Health Service Capacity Review 2018 outlines projections of demand and capacity requirements for a range of health services to 2031. Accordingly, it forecasts that a 120% increase in home-care services will be required by 2031 if key reforms and productivity measures are implemented.

Autism Support Services

279. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health the services publicly available for children with autism in an area (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29522/18]

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 Card Administration

280. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the services covered by a full medical card that are not available free to holders of a 2015A scheme card; the reason a difference exists between both; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29523/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Redress for Women Resident in Certain Institutions Act 2015 (RWRCI Act) makes provision for a range of primary and community health services (and benefits) in Ireland for women who qualify under the Department of Justice & Equality Restorative Justice Scheme for women who were admitted to and worked in the Magdalene Laundries and similar institutions.

The RWRCI Act provides a statutory basis to grant a 2015A card to women who qualify under this Act. It therefore provides a statutory basis to more services than the medical card, e.g. physiotherapy, chiropody, counselling, home help. In addition, holders do not pay the prescription fee, have enhanced dental services and can attend a GP of choice, once that GP is registered. Furthermore, the ex-gratia payments awarded under the Department of Justice & Equality Restorative Justice Scheme are not included in the means assessment for a medical or GP visit card or the 'Fair Deal' scheme.

Hospital Services

281. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 740 of 12 June 2018, the reason convalescent care is not provided after an elective surgery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29524/18]

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

Hospital Procedures

282. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 740 of 12 June 2018, the reason the surgery is classed as an elective surgery when the person was told it was necessary for their health. [29525/18]

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.

Disabilities Assessments

283. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the length of time a person is waiting for an assessment with the NDT in County Kildare; the reason for delays in assessments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29526/18]

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

284. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 720 of 12 June 2018, the reason diagnoses have not been carried out within the recommended six-month period from referral. [29527/18]

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

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

Disabilities Assessments

285. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the number of child psychologists carrying out assessments in the NDT in County Kildare. [29528/18]

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 Staff

286. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the procedure in cases in which a child psychologist employed in a NDT goes on maternity leave. [29529/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Govern-

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

The particular issue raised by the Deputy is a service matter for the HSE. Accordingly I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Health Services Staff

287. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 739 of 12 June 2018, if there are primary care psychologists working in County Kildare. [29532/18]

288. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 739 of 12 June 2018, the resources that prevented the HSE from finding a replacement while the psychologist is on maternity leave [29533/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 287 and 288 together.

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

Mental Health Services

289. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Health the provisions made to develop woman-centred mental health services for 2018, 2019 and 2020, reflecting the commitment in the national strategy for women and girls to address the particular physical and mental health needs of women and girls; the funding allocated for the training of health care professionals in trauma informed care and the impacts of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence on mental health; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29538/18]

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

290. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Health the women-only spaces available in mental health services; the amount of funding allocated for these services in 2018, 2019 and 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29539/18]

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

Health Services Provision

291. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when an assessment for support services will be carried out in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29546/18]

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

Disabilities Assessments

292. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the timeframe for conducting an assessment of need following an application being received; if there are variations between different parts of the country; if so, the locations; the reason this is the case; if cases such as that of a person (details supplied) are commonplace; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29550/18]

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 Admissions

293. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) currently in University Hospital Kerry will receive a bed in Listowel Community Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29558/18]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

294. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a colonoscopy requested by a doctor has taken four years to conduct; the waiting times for the procedure nationally and specifically in St. James's Hospital, Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29559/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the particular query raised by the Deputy regarding St. James's Hospital, as this is a service issue, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Hospital Waiting Lists Action Plans

295. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health his plans to reduce the waiting times in St. James's Hospital, Dublin, for a colonoscopy appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29560/18]

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

Hospital Procedures

296. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health if there have been changes in operating procedures in St. James's Hospital relating to conducting colonoscopies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29561/18]

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.

Cancer Screening Programmes

297. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health the laboratories and-or hospitals in which screening tests for colon cancer are carried out; the number carried out since 2010 in each of these locations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29562/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): BowelScreen - the National Bowel Screening Programme commenced in 2012. The National Screening Service (NSS) have advised that the primary screening tool for BowelScreen is the Faecal Immunochemical Test (FIT), which operates on an automated testing platform. The FIT looks for blood in a stool sample which may indicate the presence of abnormal growths in the bowel which can become cancer. It is important to note that the FIT test itself cannot screen for colon cancer.

The National Screening Service (NSS) have advised that all FIT tests are examined by MedLab Pathology. An abnormal FIT result suggests that there may be bleeding within the gastrointestinal tract that requires further investigation. Those with an abnormal result are then invited for further testing via a colonoscopy at a hospital-based screening colonoscopy unit. The colonoscopy units which currently provide colonoscopies on behalf of BowelScreen are based in 14 hospitals across the country. They are:

1. Clonmel Hospital;
2. Connolly Hospital, Blanchardstown;
3. Ennis Hospital;
4. University Hospital Galway;
5. Kerry General Hospital;
6. Letterkenny University Hospital;
7. Louth County Hospital;
8. Mater Misericordiae University Hospital;

9. Mercy University Hospital Cork;
10. Roscommon Hospital;
11. St James' Hospital Dublin;
12. Sligo General Hospital;
13. St Vincent's University Hospital; and
14. Wexford General Hospital.

Figures that follow show the activity related to the screening and diagnostic testing elements of the screening process. BowelScreen began inviting men and women to participate in the national bowel screening programme in October 2012, hence the reason for the provision of figures from this date.

Date Range	Number of satisfactory BowelScreen FIT tests completed and examined by MedLab Pathology
01/10/2012 - 30/06/2018	471,508

Colonoscopies carried out by hospital-based screening colonoscopy units, 01/10/2012 - 30/06/2018

Hospital	Number of colonoscopies
Clonmel Hospital	865
Connolly Hospital	1,093
Ennis Hospital	1,301
University Hospital Galway	1,582
Kerry General Hospital	1,020
Letterkenny University Hospital	661
Louth County Hospital	748
Mater Misericordiae University Hospital	1,698
Mercy University Hospital, Cork	1,219
Roscommon Hospital	948
St James' Hospital, Dublin	2,110
Sligo General Hospital	939
St Vincent's University Hospital	2,554
Wexford General Hospital	1,382
Total	18,120

Departmental Contracts Data

298. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the number of times his Department has engaged polling companies and-or Irish market researchers to conduct research on its behalf in each of the past two years; the names of such companies; the costs associated with same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29576/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I do not believe my Department is using polling companies but my officials will check Department records and come back to the Deputy

as soon as possible.

Hepatitis C Incidence

299. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the HSE's plans to develop metrics for an elimination strategy for HCV; the steps the HSE will take to reach its stated goal of having Ireland HCV free by 2026; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29584/18]

300. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the reason the 2018 tender for HCV medicines has not been finalised; if the tender results will be released as soon as possible; the steps he will take to prevent the delay being repeated in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29585/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 299 and 300 together.

As the HSE has responsibility for this matter, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy on this issue.

Hepatitis C Incidence

301. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if he will instruct the HSE to release details of the HCV testing and community implementation budget to persons (details supplied) and interested groups for review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29586/18]

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

Departmental Consultations

302. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health the stage the consultation on Portlaoise Hospital is at; and the timeframe for completion. [29623/18]

303. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health the stakeholders that will be met by his officials during the public consultation process on Portlaoise Hospital. [29624/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 302 and 303 together.

I am committed to securing and further developing the role of the Midland Regional Hospital Portlaoise as a constituent hospital within the Dublin Midlands Hospital Group. Since 2014, the focus has been on supporting the hospital to develop and enhance management capability, implementing changes required to address clinical service deficiencies, and incorporating the hospital into the governance structures within the Dublin Midlands Hospital Group.

Significant work has been undertaken to strengthen and stabilise current arrangements for services at the hospital to ensure that services that are not sustainable are discontinued and those that are, are safety assured and adequately resourced. Funding has increased by 35% relative to the 2012 budget and staffing levels have risen by 29% from the 2014 base. Governance and management arrangements in Portlaoise Hospital have been strengthened, additional clinical

staff has been appointed and staff training, hospital culture and communications have improved.

As agreed at a meeting with Laois Oireachtas members, I am currently giving consideration to a process for wider consultation and no decision has been made on future changes to services at Portlaoise.

Drugs Payment Scheme

304. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the minimum charge for persons with medical cards to pay for medicines which they receive by way of prescription; the minimum charge per item; the maximum charge per prescription; the monthly limit payable in these cases; the arrangements in place to ensure there is no overpayment by a couple in cases in which a husband and wife receive their prescriptions in two different pharmacies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29651/18]

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.

Hospitals Building Programme

305. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Health the status of the new proposed PPP community hospital for Letterkenny; the progress made to date; when planning permission will be sought for same; the timeframe for construction; if funding is in place for its delivery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29697/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The Department has asked the Health Service Executive to provide the Deputy directly with the current position in relation to the proposed development of a public private partnership community nursing unit in Letterkenny, Donegal.

GLAS Issues

306. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if exemptions to the GLAS wild bird cover measures which require certain crops to be sown (details supplied) will be sought; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29453/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department continues to monitor the situation outlined. Where GLAS inspections have taken place or are taking place on holdings that contain the Wild Bird Cover action cases are being examined on an individual basis and this examination will take into consideration the ongoing weather conditions.

Harness Racing Industry

307. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 222 of 27 June 2018, the locations of the education pro-

grammes that have successfully been awarded a tender; the name of the course provider; the costs awarded to the provider; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29565/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The initial location of the education programme was Garristown in North Dublin. Further courses are planned for Tipperary, Cork and the Midlands this year. The next of these is to begin in the coming weeks. A decision on the possibility of courses next year will be taken in light of experience gained, and demand from would be participants.

The tender was awarded to O'Scanail and Associates Veterinary Surgeons. The tender provides for costs of up to €21,650 for each course to cover the various course modules, specialist speakers and location rental.

The approach being taken by my Department has been to raise the awareness of the importance of good horse welfare amongst sulky participants and the owners and keepers of trotting horses. The tender was awarded with a view to conducting an education program designed for sulky drivers and trotter horse owners with a specific requirement that members of the Travelling Community be catered for.

This course is designed to encourage participants to move away from the road racing practices and move to racing on tracks and to engage with the regulated sport of harness racing on tracks as operated by the Irish Harness Racing Association. The feedback from participants in the first course has been very positive.

Consultancy Contracts Data

308. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of times his Department has engaged polling companies and-or Irish market researchers to conduct research on its behalf in each of the past two years; the names of such companies; the costs associated with same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29566/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I wish to advise the Deputy that the information requested is outlined in the following table.

In 2017 the Department engaged Behaviour & Attitudes, a market research company, as part of the Spending Review on the TAMS Agricultural Modernisation Scheme. The main objective of the study was to ascertain why farmers had not yet drawn down the TAMS grant for which they had been approved.

In 2018 the Department engaged Behaviour & Attitudes to complete an Attitudinal Survey as part of Glas Evaluation contract. The overall purpose of the evaluation was:

(a) to assess the effectiveness of GLAS as a contributory measure towards sustainable Irish agriculture under the RDP 2014-2020,

(b) to assess its contribution towards the achievement of wider environmental objectives, and

(c) to fulfil, in part at least, Ireland's commitment towards the monitoring and evaluation requirements set out in the RDP.

2017

Name of companies engaged in Polling and or Irish Market researchers to conduct research on behalf of Department	No of Times companies engaged for this service	Cost €
Behaviour & Attitudes , Market Research company,(engaged as part of the Spending Review on the TAMS Agricultural Modernisation Scheme)	1	7,380

2018

Name of companies engaged in Polling and or Irish Market researchers to conduct research on behalf of Department	No of Times companies engaged for this service	Cost €
Behaviour & Attitudes, Market research company (engaged to complete an Attitudinal Survey as part of GLAS Evaluation contract)	1	6,608

National Broadband Plan Implementation

309. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the date for the roll-out of high speed broadband for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29480/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector. Today, 7 out of 10 of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland have access to high speed broadband. By 2020, 9 out of 10 premises will have access to a high speed broadband connection. This is being achieved via a combination of commercial investment and a State led intervention.

The premises referred to by the Deputy falls within a BLUE area on my Department's High Speed Broadband Map available at www.broadband.gov.ie and is within the area targeted for delivery of high speed broadband by commercial operators. While telecommunications companies operate in a liberalised market and I have no statutory authority to intervene in their day to day operations, my Department is collating information in relation to cases/areas where commercial plans to provide access to high speed broadband to premises have not materialised. In this regard, where a premises situated in a BLUE area is unable to obtain a high speed broadband service I encourage customers to contact my Department directly at broadband@dcae.gov.ie with details - quoting their address, eircode and fixed line telephone number (if available) and details of operators they have contacted with a view to obtaining a broadband service. This information assists my Department in identifying areas for further focus and facilitates engagement with telecommunication operators on this issue. My Department is aware that there are premises in the townland of Ringmeen that do not appear to have access to a high speed broadband service from a commercial provider, including the premises referenced by the Deputy, even though they are in a Blue area on the High Speed Broadband Map, and my Department is investigating this matter.

For those premises currently awaiting access to high speed broadband, practical initiatives will continue to be addressed through the work of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce to address obstacles and improve connectivity in respect of existing and future mobile phone and broadband services. My officials have carried out a desk top survey of the premises in Ringmeen and have determined that there are 4G options (eir mobile and 3 Ireland) by means of the

4G antennas in the Ferryport at Ringaskiddy some 1500 metres away. This is an alternative option while commercial plans materialise

Under this Taskforce, engagement between telecommunications operators and local authorities through the Broadband Officers is continuing to strengthen. These Broadband Officers are acting as single points of contact in local authorities for their communities. The appointment of these officers is already reaping rewards in terms of ensuring a much greater degree of consistency in engagements with operators and clearing obstacles to developing infrastructure. There is a link to a list of these local Broadband Officers on my Department's website at <https://www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/communications/topics/Broadband/national-broadband-plan/latest-news/Pages/Broadband-Officers-Workshop.aspx>.

Energy Efficiency

310. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the reason for the delay in a company (details supplied) receiving approval from SEAI; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29492/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Accelerated Capital Allowance (ACA) scheme is a tax incentive to encourage companies to invest in energy efficient equipment. The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) administers the 'Triple E' Register that defines the technical criteria for products that are then eligible for the ACA scheme. SEAI is responsible for setting the eligibility criteria for the Register and maintaining and reviewing the list of eligible products.

The Register contains energy efficient equipment listed under ten broad categories and 52 associated classes of technology. The Register sets minimum criteria that products are required to meet to be listed, backed up by internationally accepted test standards. The categories are set down, and revised, in the supporting Statutory Instruments for the ACA, which also gives legal effect to new categories and eligibility criteria when necessary.

I have enquired with SEAI and I understand that the Deputy is referring to a request for approval to have a product included on the "Triple E" Register. I understand that the product in question does not fit within any of the existing categories or technology groups. Therefore, it is not yet possible for it to be assessed against the published technical criteria and considered for inclusion on the Register.

SEAI has a robust assessment process in place for adding new technologies and criteria to the Register, which would then need to be updated through Statutory Instrument. SEAI is currently reviewing the proposal made by the company in question to ascertain that there is a sufficient evidence base to confirm this technology's energy saving potential.

It is my understanding that SEAI will revert to the company shortly with a series of queries to be addressed. Whether, and over what timescale, it might be possible to make provision for inclusion of the product on the Register will be dependant on the company being able to satisfactorily address the relevant issues and demonstrate the requisite standards.

Departmental Contracts Data

311. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of times his Department has engaged polling companies and-or Irish

market researchers to conduct research on its behalf in each of the past two years; the names of such companies; the costs associated with same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29569/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): My Department has engaged the services of an Irish market research company to conduct research on two occasions during the period in question, the details of which are set out in the following table.

-	Year	€	-
iReach Insights	2017	€6,027	Survey of consumer attitudes to waste
iReach Insights	2018	€7,318	Follow up survey of consumer attitudes to waste

Taxi Regulations

312. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the steps he is taking to ensure there is no shortage of taxis in view of the significant reduction in the number of taxi drivers in the past five years; the steps he is taking to address the high costs of insurance faced by new taxi drivers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29542/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): In relation to insurance, I am aware that the increases in premium costs of motor insurance in recent years has been a cause for concern for all drivers, including the owners of Small Public Service Vehicles (SPSVs). However, I am happy to note that recent CSO figures show overall motor premiums for the year 2018 as being lower in comparison to those for the previous two years.

As you may know, the pricing of insurance products is a commercial issue for insurance companies, based on an assessment of the risks that 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. Following the publication of the Department of Finance Working Group's Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance last year, the Advisory Committee on SPSVs met with Insurance Ireland and both parties have agreed that there should be ongoing engagement between them. I believe that this will be an important channel to ensure that the concerns of taxi drivers can be articulated and addressed.

As the Deputy will be aware, the regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) sector is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013. I understand that the NTA has been taking some actions, including changes in their approach to Driver Entry Test to encourage growth in the number of drivers entering the SPSV industry. I will refer the Deputy's Question in relation to these matters to the NTA for direct reply by them. Please inform my office, should an answer not be received within 10 days.

Departmental Contracts Data

313. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of times his Department has engaged polling companies and-or Irish market researchers to conduct research on its behalf in each of the past two years; the names of such companies; the costs associated with same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29582/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Information relating

to all expenditure by my Department on external services is available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.dttas.ie/corporate/english/expenditure-external-services>

The information is updated twice yearly. The first six months of 2018 will be published later in the year.

Electric Vehicles

314. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the speed limits for electric bicycles will be increased from 25 to 30 km; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29591/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I have no proposals at this time for amending legislation in relation to electric bicycles.

Road Projects Data

315. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the cost of the new intersection under construction on the M7 between junctions 9 and 10 outside Naas; if part of the cost is being met by developer contributions; and his views on whether the provision of this infrastructure will contribute to meeting the aims of the national planning framework. [29595/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and operation of individual roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

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

Transport Infrastructure Provision

316. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will agree to a request made in a letter sent by a group (details supplied) in County Donegal to meet with him, the relevant Ministers and local Houses of the Oireachtas Members to discuss a section of the proposed Ten-T priority route project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29631/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I can assure the Deputy that any such meeting request received will be considered in line with normal procedure.

School Completion Programme

317. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the estimated cost of restoring funding to the school completion programme to 2010 levels. [29447/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As the Deputy

may be aware, responsibility for the National Educational Welfare Board which included the School Completion Programme was transferred to my Department on its establishment in 2011.

Upon the establishment of Tusla, the Child and Family Agency on January 1st 2014, operational responsibility for the School Completion Programme was transferred to the Agency.

The School Completion Programmes are funded in line with the academic year commencing in September each year. The funding available to the School Completion Programme for the school year 2017/2018 stands at €24.756m. An increase in funding of €6.24m per annum would be required to bring funding levels back to the pre-2011 funding level which stood at €31m.

Ministerial Appointments

318. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of other roles and board memberships a person (details supplied) has; and her views on whether the person will have the ability to dedicate enough energy to ensuring the implementation of the report's recommendations in view of the person's workload. [29544/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I can advise the Deputy that Dr. Ryan is currently serving as Interim Director of the Irish Museum of Modern Art in a part-time capacity, pending the appointment of a new Director. The competition for this position is currently under way and it is expected that an appointment will be made in the coming weeks. Dr Ryan is also a member of the Policing Authority.

I am confident that Dr. Ryan is in a position to devote the necessary time and energy to chair the Implementation Assurance Group which I am establishing, on HIQA's recommendation, and I look forward to working with him on this important project.

Departmental Contracts Data

319. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of times her Department has engaged polling companies and-or Irish market researchers to conduct research on its behalf in each of the past two years; the names of such companies; the costs associated with same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29568/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I can confirm that my Department has not engaged any polling companies or Irish market researchers to conduct research on its behalf since June 2016 to date.

Library Projects

320. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of the provision of a new library for Edgeworthstown; if the original funding commitment will be increased in view of the publication of the national library plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29484/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The provision of premises and facilities in the public library service is generally a matter for each local authority in its capacity as a library authority under the Local Government Act 2001. Accord-

ingly, the development of the new library in Edgeworthstown is primarily a matter for Longford County Council.

My Department provides funding under the Libraries Capital Investment Programme and will invest some €23m in 17 or so projects over the period 2016 to 2021. Some €1.25m has been allocated to Edgeworthstown Library under the programme and the project is currently progressing through the Department's Four Stage Approval Process.

While the libraries capital programme is fully committed at this time, the allocation for Edgeworthstown Library will be kept under review and may be reconsidered in the context of the final costings that emerge pursuant to the tender process, subject to the overall availability of funding within my Department's capital allocation.

Town and Village Renewal Scheme

321. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the reason funding for public artworks as part of the town and village renewal scheme 2017 has been withdrawn; his views on whether funding invested in the arts also supports the regeneration of rural towns and villages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29540/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): It was originally envisaged that a number of public Art Works would be supported as part of the 2017 Town and Village Renewal Scheme. However, the primary focus of the scheme was to support projects that could demonstrate an economic benefit for small towns and villages and their hinterlands. There was a substantial level of demand for projects of this nature and given the limited resources available under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme in 2017, all funding was allocated to projects directly supporting this regeneration objective. However, some of the approved projects included an element of public art works.

I fully acknowledge that investing in the Arts contributes to the regeneration of rural towns and villages; it also supports community development in rural areas.

One of the Pillars of the Action Plan for Rural Development focuses on Fostering Culture and Creativity in Rural Communities. A key objective of this Pillar is to increase access to the Arts and to enhance cultural facilities in rural communities. The Action Plan includes a number of commitments in this regard which fall under the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

Progress reports on the delivery of the Action Plan commitments are available on my Department's website at <https://drcd.gov.ie/about/rural/rural-development/rural-development/>.

Community Development Initiatives

322. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his plans to expand funding to rural training groups such as a group (details supplied) in order to provide additional and follow-on training courses in rural communities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29547/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Kyne): My Department provides funding to the organisation in question under the Scheme to Support National Organisations and the funding scheme for members of the Community and

Voluntary Pillar. My Department does not provide programme funding for rural training.

The Scheme to Support National Organisations (SSNO) has a primary focus on the provision of core funding to national organisations that demonstrate good governance and deliver services and supports that have a focus on one or more of the following: addressing poverty, social exclusion and promoting equality. The current three-year scheme is due to close in June 2019 and a new scheme will be put in place before then. In that context, my Department has invited submissions on the future direction of the SSNO from participants and other stakeholders.

My Department also provides funding to members of the Community and Voluntary Pillar to allow for input into the policy making process within the community and voluntary sector.

I understand that the organisation in question also receives funding from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine for its role in leading the consortium running the National Rural Network under the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020.

Departmental Contracts Data

323. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of times his Department has engaged polling companies and-or Irish market researchers to conduct research on its behalf in each of the past two years; the names of such companies; the costs associated with same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29580/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): My Department has not engaged polling companies or Irish market researchers to conduct research on behalf of the Department since its establishment on 19 July 2017.

Leader Programmes Data

324. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the amount for approved projects under the Leader programme 2014-20 paid out to date by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29587/18]

325. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the amount for approved projects under the Leader programme 2014-20 still to be paid out by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29588/18]

326. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the percentage of approved projects under the Leader programme 2014-20 paid to date by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29589/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I propose to take Questions Nos. 324 to 326, inclusive, together.

Leader is a multi-annual programme for the period 2014-2020 and has a total budget of €250 million.

The table provides the following details requested by the Deputy:

- the amount approved to date for projects under the Leader programme 2014-2020 broken down by county;

- the amount which has been claimed and paid in each county in respect of these projects;
- the amount which has been claimed and paid in each county in respect of these projects expressed as a percentage of the total level of approvals; and,
- the amount which remains to be paid in each county in respect of these projects.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the approved projects need time to be delivered before they can submit payment claims and draw down funding.

However, I expect the level of expenditure on projects to increase substantially in the coming months as these projects are implemented.

County		Projects Approved		Amount paid on projects	Remaining to be paid
-	No.	Value	Value	%	Value
Carlow	16	€1,060,804	€299,930	28.3	€760,874
Cavan	17	€853,786	€43,071	5.0	€810,715
Clare	72	€1,398,435	€132,990	9.5	€1,265,445
Cork	61	€2,171,826	€51,497	4.8	€2,120,329
Donegal	78	€2,772,490	€387,286	14.0	€2,385,204
Dublin Rural	29	€811,557	€71,131	8.8	€740,426
Galway	25	€424,026	€0	0.0	€424,026
Kerry	138	€2,492,276	€180,972	7.3	€2,311,304
Kildare	12	€346,781	€0	0.0	€346,781
Kilkenny	44	€1,112,431	€151,293	13.6	€961,138
Laois	37	€892,485	€24,713	2.8	€867,773
Leitrim	36	€1,458,369	€87,814	6.0	€1,370,554
Limerick	59	€2,604,948	€0	0.0	€2,604,948
Longford	27	€503,756	€4,109	0.8	€499,647
Louth	26	€479,110	€53,767	11.2	€425,344
Mayo	61	€2,190,702	€203,502	9.3	€1,987,200
Meath	12	€337,394	€19,956	5.9	€317,438
Monaghan	24	€1,101,072	€136,508	12.4	€964,564
Offaly	71	€1,277,417	€280,659	22.0	€996,758
Roscommon	16	€587,224	€0	0.0	€587,224
Sligo	56	€1,647,101	€277,072	16.8	€1,370,029
Tipperary	76	€2,007,271	€100,155	5.0	€1,907,116
Waterford	34	€2,388,200	€511,796	21.4	€1,876,404
Westmeath	31	€473,460	€11,644	2.5	€461,817
Wexford	47	€1,441,057	€75,856	5.3	€1,365,200
Wicklow	21	€383,247	€0	0.0	€383,247
Total	1,126	€33,217,225	€3,105,720	9.35	€30,111,505

Seniors Alert Scheme

327. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the position regarding funding for house alarms and grants payable to persons in County Kildare;

and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29648/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): My Department is responsible for the Seniors Alert Scheme which encourages community support for vulnerable older people in our communities through the provision of personal monitored alarms to enable them to live securely in their homes with confidence, independence and peace of mind. Funding is available under the scheme towards the purchase by a registered community-based organisation of a personal alarm or pendant.

Following a review, a new version of the scheme came into effect on 1 November 2017. A number of changes were introduced under the new scheme including the provision of free monitoring for the first year and a revision of the living alone requirements. I am pleased to advise the Deputy that the revised scheme has been a resounding success with unprecedented levels of demand for the new package.

The issue of the introduction of funding for the installation of house alarms is a matter for my colleague the Minister for Justice and Equality under his remit of community crime prevention.

Free Travel Scheme

328. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if proposals will be brought forward for a pensioner travel allowance prior to budget 2019 which would provide an allowance to those in receipt of a State pension who live in a degree of rural isolation (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29504/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Any decision to introduce a travel allowance along the lines suggested by the Deputy would significantly change the nature of the free travel scheme and would have considerable budgetary consequences. Various alternatives to the existing system, including the use of vouchers, have been examined previously by my Department. It concluded that a voucher type system, which would be open to a wide range of transport providers including taxis, would be extremely difficult to administer, open to misuse and unlikely to be sufficient to provide for an acceptable amount of travel.

Under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme my Department may award a travel supplement in any case where the circumstances of the case so warrant. The supplement is intended to assist with ongoing or recurring travel costs that cannot be met from the client's own resources and are deemed to be necessary. Every decision is based on consideration of the circumstances of the case, taking account of the nature and extent of the need and of the resources of the person concerned.

I acknowledge that not all customers have easy access to transport providers participating in the free travel scheme particularly in parts of rural Ireland. A further provision of €10 million was made for the scheme in Budget 2018 to facilitate more private commercial operators joining the free travel scheme for the first time, existing participants adding more routes, and operators returning to the scheme where they had previously withdrawn.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Appeals

329. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to ensure that no delays are made in the processing of the payment of a domiciliary care allowance and all subsequent arrears to a person (details supplied) following a decision of the social welfare appeals office upholding the appeal made by the person; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29455/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): This lady was notified by the Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO) on 26 June 2018 that her domiciliary care allowance was awarded on appeal.

Once the administrative procedures have been completed, a decision letter will issue by post notifying her of the date of award of DCA and when payment will issue. Payment of all arrears due will issue along with her first payment.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Working Family Payment Data

330. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated annual cost of administering the working family payment scheme; and the percentage of the annual spend on the scheme. [29471/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): An estimate of €431.3m has been provided for in the 2018 Revised Estimates for the Working Family Payment. It is not possible to disaggregate the cost of administering the Working Family Payment scheme from the overall costs of Department's administration because staff processing claims for any scheme are typically working on a range of schemes.

State Pension (Contributory) Data

331. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the standard State pension will be returned to pre-recession levels as part of budget 2019; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29512/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): In 2006, the maximum rate of the State Pension (contributory) was €193.30. This was increased by €14 to €209.30 for 2007 and by €14 again for 2008 bringing the rate to €223.30. In January 2009, the contributory pension was increased by €7 to bring the rate to €230.30.

As the recession continued, the contributory pension rate did not see any reduction, and remained at €230.30 until an increase of €3 in 2016. The rate has since increased each year since and currently stands at €243.30, some €50 more than it was in 2006.

The following table (with data as at December 2017) shows that the rates of pension payments today are largely higher now, in real terms, than they were at the start of 2007. One exception to this is those with a Yearly Average of between 10-14 contributions. This means that such people had very few paid or credited contributions (generally 10-13 years) over the course of working life. Most people in that category will qualify for a higher rate payment under the State Pension Non-Contributory or under the Increase for a Qualified Adult on the Contributory Pension, unless they have substantial means, which means that they are significantly better off than most pensioners.

-	Rate 1 Jan 2007	Adjusted for CPI 2007-2017	Rate Dec 2017	% change
Average Earnings	€675.80	€717.70	€714.41	-0.46%
Average Earnings less USC	€675.80	€717.70	€694.19	-3.28%
SPC 48+, WCP	€193.30	€205.28	€238.30	16.08%
SPC 40-47	€189.50	€201.25	€233.60	16.08%
SPC 30-39	€189.50	€201.25	€214.20	6.44%
SPC 20-29	€189.50	€201.25	€202.80	0.77%
SPC 15-19	€145.00	€153.99	€155.20	0.79%
SPC 10-14	€96.70	€102.70	€95.20	-7.30%
SPNC	€182.00	€193.28	€227.00	17.44%

Any changes to the rate of the State Pension (contributory) could have significant budget implications and would have to be considered in the context of overall budgetary negotiations.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Bereavement Grant

332. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if reinstating the death grant as a social welfare entitlement will be considered; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29514/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): During the economic downturn, my Department protected primary social welfare rates and in recent years, as the economy recovered, the Government has concentrated resources in improving the core rates of payments, particularly for pensioners. Abolishing the bereavement grant provided a significant annual saving and allowed my Department to protect other core social welfare payments such as the State pension.

The number of bereavement grant claims in 2013 was 23,716, and this represented an increase of approximately 4% on 2012. Based on a similar yearly increase each year since 2013, it is estimated that the number of bereavement grant claims that might arise in 2019, were the scheme to be re-introduced, would be in the region of 30,000, and the number would be expected to increase in future years. Accordingly, if there were 30,000 such grants made in 2019, at a rate of €850 each, the cost would be approx. €25.5 million.

Any decision to reinstate the Bereavement Grant would have to be considered in the context of overall budgetary negotiations.

It is worth noting that there are a range of supports available for people following bereavement which provide more significant support than the grant. These include weekly-paid widow's, widower's or surviving civil partner's (contributory and non-contributory) pensions, which are based on contributions or a means test, and a once-off widowed or surviving civil partner grant of €6,000 where there is a dependent child. A number of social welfare payments, including State pension, continue in payment for six weeks following a death. In Budget 2016, the Government increased the payment after death period to 12 weeks for carer's allowance. Guardian payments are available where someone cares for an orphaned child. A special funeral grant of €850 is paid where a person dies because of an accident at work or occupational disease.

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Under the SWA scheme, the Department of Social Protection may make a single exceptional needs payment (ENP) to help meet essential, once-off expenditure which a person could not reasonably be expected to meet from their weekly income, which may include help with funeral and burial expenses.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Personal Public Service Numbers

333. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an application for a PPS number by a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29537/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): While an application was received from the person concerned, not all documentation was provided. The applicant has been notified of this and has been asked to provide all of the required documentation.

Where a person comes or is coming to the State and requires a PPS Number, they can attend and apply in person at a PPS Number allocation centre. At this centre, they should provide acceptable evidence of identity and proof that a PPS Number is required in order to carry out a transaction with a specified body.

Where a person is not present in the State and requires a PPS Number to transact business with a public body, a separate registration process is provided by the Department by post or email. Copies of identity documents and evidence as to the requirement for a PPS Number are provided by the applicant.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Treatment Benefit Scheme

334. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person (details supplied) whose glasses were stolen can avail of the treatment benefit scheme to have them replaced; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29543/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The treatment benefit scheme provides for an optical examination and new spectacles every second calendar year for everyone who meets the PRSI qualification criteria. There are no special allowances for spectacles that have been stolen within that period.

However, as the person concerned last claimed under the optical benefit scheme more than two years ago he is eligible to claim for a new pair of spectacles in the normal way. This can be done by making an appointment with his optician, who will be able to initiate the claim process for him.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Telephone Support Allowance

335. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protec-

tion if the telephone allowance will be increased from €2.50 to €4 per month as proposed by an organisation (details supplied); her plans to expand this allowance to all recipients of the State pension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29548/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The new Telephone Support Allowance (TSA) is a weekly payment of €2.50 not a monthly payment. Customers of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection who are in receipt of a qualifying payment and who are also in receipt of the Living Alone Allowance and the Fuel Allowance automatically qualify for the TSA. Approximately 127,000 customers are in receipt of the TSA payment. The estimated full year cost of the scheme is €16.14 million.

The primary objective of the TSA is to allow the most vulnerable people access to personal alarms or phones for security. The allowance will also encourage social contact and assist in the prevention of social isolation for those living alone.

The criteria for the TSA are framed in order to direct the limited resources available to my Department in as targeted a manner as possible. Fuel Allowance is a means tested payment and these criteria will ensure that the TSA payment goes to those most at risk of social isolation.

Any decision to extend the TSA scheme to all pensioners regardless of their means or personal circumstances or to increase the weekly rate to €4 would have significant budget implications and would have to be considered in the context of overall budgetary negotiations.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Departmental Contracts Data

336. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of times her Department has engaged polling companies and-or Irish market researchers to conduct research on its behalf in each of the past two years; the names of such companies; the costs associated with same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29573/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The information requested is currently being compiled by my Department and will be provided to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Jobseeker's Payments

337. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the length of time persons must wait before applying for jobseeker's benefit and-or jobseeker's allowance in cases in which they are made redundant as part of a voluntary redundancy scheme in a large company; if there is a period of non-payment in view of the fact that their employment finished as a result of their voluntary redundancy package; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29646/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The 2018 Estimates for my Department provide for expenditure this year on the jobseeker's schemes of €2.17 billion.

Jobseeker's benefit (JB) is a contingency based social welfare payment typically for employees who have suffered a substantial loss of employment and have sufficient social insur-

ance contributions to qualify. If a person does not qualify for JB they may qualify for means-tested jobseeker's allowance (JA).

There is no disqualification from receiving JB irrespective of the amount of the redundancy payment for claimants 55 years of age or over. A person under 55 years of age who has been made redundant, shall be disqualified from receiving JB for a period of up to 9 weeks from the last date of employment where the person has received or is entitled to a payment in excess of a prescribed amount under the Redundancy Payments Acts or under an agreement with his/her employer. The amounts and periods of disqualification are provided in the tabular statement. The amount includes the gross amount of all payments in respect of the redundancy, e.g. statutory redundancy, top-up or *ex-gratia* payments related to weeks of service, early encashment of pension entitlements (if from employer's funds), and any other money received under an agreement with the employer.

Where an applicant for JB may have an entitlement to a redundancy settlement which is not yet negotiated, a JB claim may be awarded (if all other conditions are satisfied) pending receipt of the redundancy settlement. When the details of the redundancy payments become available, the JB claim is reviewed. Where necessary a revised decision is then made and a period of disqualification as appropriate applied.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

The following table the length of time a person may be disqualified from receiving jobseekers benefit having regard to the gross amount of redundancy received.

Amount of Redundancy	Period of Disqualification
€50,000.00 - €55,000	1 Week
€55,000.01 - €60,000	2 Weeks
€60,000.01 - €65,000	3 Weeks
€65,000.01 - €70,000	4 Weeks
€70,000.01 - €75,000	5 Weeks
€75,000.01 - €80,000	6 Weeks
€80,000.01 - €85,000	7 Weeks
€85,000.01 - €90,000	8 Weeks
€90,000.01 and over	9 Weeks

Back to Education Allowance Eligibility

338. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the fact that there is an anomaly between eligibility criteria for progression routes in the postgraduate applications centre, PAC, system when applying for higher diploma programmes as compared to the back to education system; the steps which have been taken to address this inequality; the way in which she is advising persons; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29703/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The back to education allowance (BTEA) is a scheme that allows persons in receipt of certain social welfare payments the opportunity to pursue a course of study, while still maintaining their income support, subject to satisfying a number of conditions. The conditions include progressing in the level of education held by the client with reference to the national framework of qualifications.

BTEA applicants holding a qualification at tertiary education level (certificate, diploma, primary degree or post graduate qualification) are not approved under the BTEA to pursue a course at a similar or lower qualification level. However, the BTEA may be approved if a person holds a HETAC level 8 Honours degree and wishes to pursue a Higher Diploma at HETAC Level 8 as this is considered progression.

Overall, it is important to note that the purpose of the BTEA is to raise educational and skill levels so as to improve a welfare recipient's employment prospects. Progression in education is a condition which is not unique to BTEA. State support for education purposes is grounded on a student progressing from one qualification level to a higher one. Administration of BTEA is aligned with the student support schemes under the Department of Education and Skills.

PAC (the Postgraduate Applications Centre) is an agent for and acts on behalf of the universities participating in the Application System. PAC is an administrative facility.

If the Deputy is referring to a particular case, she should forward the details to my Department for review.

I hope this clarifies the matter.

Local Authority Housing

339. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if a full and urgent structural review of local authority flat complexes has been ordered in view of the severe structural deficits found at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29468/18]

340. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if a ministerial directive will be issued to Dublin City Council to urgently relocate residents at a location (details supplied) while structural repair work takes place in view of the health and safety risks of remaining in the building; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29469/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 339 and 340 together.

The management and maintenance of local authority housing stock, including the implementation of planned maintenance programmes and the carrying out of responsive repairs for tenants living in social housing, is a matter for each individual local authority under section 58 of the Housing Act 1966. Therefore the specific issue raised is a matter for Dublin City Council (DCC).

I am advised by DCC that condition surveys of all of its flat complexes are being carried out in the context of the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2017. In the specific case referred to, DCC will be advised by the consultant engineers appointed to carry out the structural examination as to whether the works to make these stairwells safe can be carried out while the residents remain in their homes. The safety of tenants is of the utmost importance to DCC and they continue to take all necessary steps to ensure this.

Tenant Purchase Scheme

341. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Govern-

ment if it is a requirement of the tenant purchase scheme that an applicant's income must be derived from work in cases in which the combined social welfare and private pension income is more than €15,000 a year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29473/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme came into operation on 1 January 2016. The Scheme is open to eligible tenants, including joint tenants, of local authority houses that are available for sale under the Scheme. To be eligible, tenants must meet certain criteria, including having a minimum reckonable income of €15,000 per annum and having been in receipt of social housing support for at least one year.

The minimum reckonable income for eligibility under the scheme is determined by the relevant local authority in accordance with the detailed provisions of the Ministerial Direction issued under Sections 24(3) and (4) of the 2014 Act. In the determination of the minimum reckonable income, local authorities include income from a number of different sources and classes, such as from employment, private pensions, maintenance payments and certain social welfare payments, including pensions, where the social welfare payment is secondary to employment income.

In determining reckonable income, the income of all tenants of the house, including adult children that are joint tenants, is included, as is the income of the spouse, civil partner or other partner / co-habitant of a tenant who lives in the house with them, thus ensuring the appropriate level of discount is applied to the purchase price.

The minimum income criterion was introduced in order to ensure the sustainability of the scheme. Applicants must demonstrate that they have an income that is long-term and sustainable in nature. This ensures that the tenant purchasing the house is in a financial position, as the owner, to maintain and insure the property for the duration of the charged period, in compliance with the conditions of the order transferring the ownership of, and responsibility for, the house from the local authority to the tenant.

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. In finalising the report some further consultation was necessary and due consideration had to be given to possible implementation arrangements. These matters are now almost completed and I expect to be in a position to publish the outcome of the review shortly.

Housing Assistance Payment

342. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the supports and services in place for persons in the Dublin City Council area who move from the rent supplement payment to the housing assistance payment when they take up full-time work after a period of unemployment and retraining; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29487/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In relation to Housing supports, any household assessed as eligible for social housing is immediately eligible for housing support through the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme.

Once a household has been deemed eligible for social housing support, it is a matter for the local authority to examine the suite of social housing supports available, including the HAP scheme, to determine the most appropriate form of social housing support for that household in the administrative area of that local authority. Administration of the scheme is a matter for the relevant Local Authority.

HAP provides fast, flexible housing support to households in an area of their choice. Individuals with a housing need, who in the past were reluctant to avail of full time work as they would lose their Rent Supplement (RS) support, can now move to HAP and avail of full-time work and retain their housing support, with an adjustment in their differential rent.

HAP will replace RS for those with a long term housing need, who qualify for social housing support. However, RS will remain available through the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) to households as a short-term income support. The strategic aim is to complete the transfers from long term rent supplement to HAP by 2020, as outlined in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness.

I continue to keep the operation of HAP under review but I am currently satisfied with how the scheme is operating and I consider it to be a key vehicle for meeting current housing need and fulfilling the ambitious programme set out in Rebuilding Ireland.

Emergency Accommodation Data

343. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the records that are kept of families that have had to seek emergency housing provision in Garda stations throughout the country in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29490/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of accommodation and associated services for homeless persons rests with individual housing authorities, consequently the specific data sought in the Question is not available in my Department and is a matter for the relevant housing authorities.

The DRHE has informed my Department that additional contingency accommodation has been introduced in the Dublin region to avoid the need for any family to present to a Garda station.

Housing Assistance Payment Data

344. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of persons who have received the HAP, both homeless HAP and regular HAP, since its inception; and the number of those who have subsequently presented again as homeless to their local authorities when their HAP tenancies expired. [29521/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) provides fast, flexible housing support to households in an area of their choice. HAP supported tenancies are agreed between the landlord and the tenant; the local authority is not a party to the tenancy and has no role in its agreement. There is no

limitation placed by the scheme on the length of tenancy that can be supported by HAP. However, as with other private rental tenancies, the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 (as amended) governs the relationship between landlord and tenant and the length of the tenancy is a matter that must be agreed between the landlord and tenant in that context.

The Homeless HAP Place Finder Service operating in the Dublin local authorities, and in Cork City Council, is a targeted support for homeless households who are finding it difficult to secure HAP tenancies. The Place Finder Service has been successfully utilised by the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive (DRHE) across the Dublin local authorities since February 2015, with more than 3,000 households currently being supported by the Homeless HAP scheme. A similar service began operating in Cork City in 2017.

In order to further assist homeless households in exiting emergency accommodation, since January 2018, the Homeless HAP Place Finder Service has been made available in each of the 31 local authority areas. All local authorities are now being provided with the options to pay deposits and advance rental payments for any households in emergency homeless accommodation, in order to secure accommodation via the HAP scheme.

To qualify for these specific additional supports available to homeless households, a household must have been determined by the relevant local authority to be homeless within the meaning of section 2 of the Housing Act 1988. The operation of local homeless services, including the Place Finder Service, is a matter for each local authority.

Since the inception of HAP in 2014, more than 45,200 households have been supported including over 3,000 homeless households who received additional supports through the Homeless HAP Scheme. A breakdown of the number of households supported by HAP in each local authority area at the end of Quarter 4 2017 is available on my Department's website at the following link:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision>.

At the end of Q1 2018 a total of 5,938 households were reported as having exited HAP, this included tenant led exits; compliance exits; transfers to other forms of social housing and landlord exits. This report is based on cessations as submitted by local authorities. Reasons for cessations are typically provided by the tenant and/or landlord.

In cases where a HAP supported tenancy comes to an end, the tenant can find alternative accommodation and retain their eligibility for HAP support or the local authority may decide to offer another form of social housing support to the tenant in accordance with their scheme of letting priorities. My Department does not have details of such activity.

I continue to keep the operation of HAP under review but I am currently satisfied with how the scheme is operating and I consider it to be a key vehicle for meeting current housing need and fulfilling the ambitious programme set out in Rebuilding Ireland.

Tribunals of Inquiry Recommendations

345. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if all recommendations of the Moriarty tribunal have been implemented; the recommendations that are outstanding; and when they will be implemented. [29040/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):

The Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012 (the “2012 Act”), which was enacted on 28 July 2012, significantly enhanced the openness and transparency of political funding in Ireland. These were issues that were central to the recommendations made in the Moriarty Tribunal Report which was published in March 2011. Ultimately, the 2012 Act comprehensively addressed these core issues while also having regard to Government commitments at that time as well as recommendations from the Council of Europe Group of States Against Corruption (GRECO) and the Standards in Public Office Commission (SIPO) on other related matters.

The Tribunal recommended that all political donations, apart from those under a modest threshold, be reported and published. Under the 2012 Act, which amended the Electoral Act 1997, the threshold at which donations must be declared by a political party to SIPO fell from €5,078.95 to €1,500. The declaration threshold for a donation received by a candidate or an elected representative was reduced from €634.87 to €600. In addition, a limit of €200 was placed on donations in cash.

The threshold for the receipt of anonymous donations was reduced to €100. The donation threshold amount that gives rise to the requirement to open a political donations account was also reduced to €100. Anonymous indirect donations were banned under the 2012 Act. There was a reduction from €5,078.95 to €200 in the threshold at which donations must be reported by companies, trade unions, societies and building societies in their annual reports or returns. In addition, the threshold for donors other than companies, trade unions, societies and building societies, in reporting donations to SIPO was reduced from €5,078.95 to €1,500 for aggregate donations given in the same year.

The Moriarty Tribunal in its Report also noted that the desirability and feasibility of a complete ban on private political funding is pre-eminently a matter for the Houses of the Oireachtas and for public debate and consideration, having regard to constitutional issues that might arise, and to the national financial exigencies. With reference to this comment in the Tribunal Report, a noteworthy provision in the Act is the introduction of a ban on the acceptance of donations over €200 for political purposes from a corporate donor unless the donor has registered with SIPO. In this instance, the objective was to restrict the influence of corporate donors. Such donations also need to be accompanied by a statement confirming that the donation has been approved by a general meeting of the members of the body, or by its trustees. By restricting corporate donations in this manner, the 2012 Act went beyond the recommendations made by the Tribunal.

The 2012 Act provides for a reduction in the maximum amount that can be accepted as a political donation by an individual from €2,539.48 to €1,000. This €1,000 limit applies in respect of donations to a member of either House of the Oireachtas, a Member of the European Parliament or a member of a local authority, as well as a candidate at a Presidential, Dáil, Seanad, European Parliament or local election. The maximum amount that can be accepted as a donation by a political party, an accounting unit of a political party or a third party has been reduced from €6,348.69 to €2,500. In addition, the 2012 Act provides that political parties are required to submit audited annual accounts to SIPO for publication. This requirement also goes beyond the Moriarty Tribunal recommendation by providing that both the income and expenditure of political parties is reported and open to public scrutiny.

Social and Affordable Housing

346. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the targets for social and affordable housing in each of the years 2018 to 2027; and the estimated capital spending targets required to deliver the social and affordable housing targets

for the same period in tabular form. [29563/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Details of social housing targets, broken down by individual local authority, across build, acquisition and leasing, for the period 2018 to 2021 are available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-social-housing-delivery-targets-for-local-authorities-2018-2021/>.

More broadly, the National Development Plan 2018-2027, provides for the delivery of 112,000 new social homes over the next decade. These 112,000 new social homes will be delivered through a range of mechanisms, including build, long term leasing and acquisitions.

It should be noted that the delivery of the 112,000 new social housing homes over the next decade does not include housing supports that will be provided to households under the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) Scheme or the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS). HAP and RAS will continue to offer additional flexible housing solutions across the period to 2021 ensuring that, over the lifetime of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan, over 137,000 households will have their housing need met.

As reflected in the National Development Plan 2018-2027, some €11.6 billion in capital funding will be provided for the delivery of social homes. The specific capital allocations underpinning the various social housing delivery programmes for each year out to 2027 will be determined in the context of the annual estimates process and will reflect the blend of delivery methods and approaches required to deliver on the targets set out in the National Development Plan.

As regards the delivery of affordable homes to buy or rent, from engagements with the local authorities in Dublin, the wider Greater Dublin Area, as well as Cork and Galway cities, their initial estimates suggest that they have lands with the potential to deliver some 4,000 new affordable homes. My Department is continuing to work with the key local authorities and the Housing Agency to identify sites which would see the level of ambition increase to at least 10,000 new affordable homes from local authority owned land, and that analysis is progressing well.

In order to support local authorities to get their sites ready for affordable housing, I have decided to provide additional funding for enabling infrastructure via the Serviced Sites Fund, by re-directing the €50 million funding for Phase 2 of the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund to the Fund, thereby increasing its scale from the previously announced €25 million to €75 million. When local authority co-funding is included, an overall minimum investment of €100 million will be provided to those sites that require infrastructural investment in order for them to be brought into use for affordable housing. The call for proposals under the Serviced Site Fund issued last week.

Departmental Contracts Data

347. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of times his Department has engaged polling companies and-or Irish market researchers to conduct research on its behalf in each of the past two years; the names of such companies; the costs associated with same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29577/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department has engaged a company on one occasion in the past two years to conduct research

on its behalf, details of which are set out in the following table.

Name of Polling Company or Irish Market Researchers Engaged	Year	Costs Involved
Ipsos MRBI	2017	€75,000

The research in question is part of a joint project with the Department of Finance focused on a behavioural examination of renters' attitudes towards tenure.

Planning Data

348. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of planning permissions for housing that were extended for five years on the basis of section 42A(1)(ii) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (details supplied) in each of the years 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018; the number of housing units that were impacted, by local authority, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29592/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Planning statistics compiled annually by planning authorities for collation and publication on my Department's website do not include a breakdown on the number of planning permissions for housing developments that were extended for 5 years on the basis of section 42A(1)(ii) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended.

Such information may be sought directly from the relevant planning authority, as appropriate.

European Parliament Elections

349. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if there will be a review of European election constituency boundaries following the provision of two extra MEPs to Ireland; the timeline for the undertaking of the boundary review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29593/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): On 28 June 2018, the European Council adopted a decision on the composition of the European Parliament for the 2019-2024 parliamentary term. This provides for 13 members to be elected in Ireland, an increase from the present 11 members.

The Electoral Act 1997 (as amended) provides for the establishment of a commission to review European Parliament constituencies in the context of a change in the number of MEPs to be elected in Ireland. The provisions generally mirror those in place for a Constituency Commission, including the membership, but with shorter timelines for receipt of submissions and for presentation of a report to the Chairman of the Dáil (within two months of establishment).

I have written to the Chief Justice seeking his nomination for a Chairperson for the Commission and I intend to establish a Commission to review the constituencies as soon as practicable after receiving the nomination.

Water Conservation

350. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of offences that have been prosecuted in the past five years by Irish Water for breaches of section 54(2) of the Water Services Act 2007 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29594/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Conservation of water supplies is a key policy imperative. Safe, reliable and high quality drinking water is expensive to produce and is a precious resource.

I am advised by Irish Water that it has prosecuted no offences in the past five years for breaches of section 54(2) of the Water Services Act 2007. While enforcement and the threat of prosecution undoubtedly has a place in circumstances where persistent and willful waste of water by individual households or businesses is apparent, the real challenges in conservation terms lie in reducing per capita demands for water, eliminating leakages and wastage as far as practicable and effective management of water resources and service capacity.

On this basis I published the Water Services Policy Statement 2018-2025 on 21 May 2018 following its approval by Government. The Policy Statement sets out a series of high-level policy objectives across the three thematic areas of Quality, Conservation, and Future Proofing, which must be pursued when planning capital investment and framing current spending plans. The Policy Statement is available on my Department's website at the following link:

http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/water_services_policy_statement_2018-2025_0.pdf

The Policy Statement supports the promotion of water conservation and water resource management as an important element of water services policy that is to be reflected in strategic investment planning by Irish Water. For the period of the Policy Statement, this will involve the prioritisation of multifaceted programmes around leak detection and repair, network improvements, cost effective metering, public awareness campaigns and funding to fix customer side leaks. The National Leakage Reduction Programme in particular includes investment of some €250 million over the next four years under the Find and Fix repair scheme and the Water Mains Rehabilitation programme.

My Department continues to work with Irish Water and the Commission for Regulation of Utilities to ensure that effective water conservation arrangements as set out in the Water Services Policy Statement 2018-2025 are reflected in ongoing investment plans and connection policies. The Policy Statement also extends to rural and privately provided water services where conservation is also placed firmly at the heart of policy matters which will be reflected in the current Review of Rural Water Services and in ongoing investment decisions under the Multi-Annual Rural Water Programme.

Fire Service Staff

351. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will address the matter of the extension of the retirement age of retained fire fighters; if an expert review panel will be established to review the retirement age anomaly (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29609/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): International research indicates that the retirement age of 55 is the optimum age to ensure that fire-fighters are capable of satisfactorily performing the tasks expected of them. The retirement age of 55 years of age was introduced because of health and safety considerations related to the

job. Since the enactment of the Health, Safety and Welfare at Work Act 1989, underpinned by subsequent legislation, each fire authority, as an employer, has a statutory duty to avoid placing employees at risk.

A full time firefighter is statutorily required to retire at age 55 under the Public Service Superannuation (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2004. This retirement age is set at 55 due to the physically demanding nature of the fire-fighter role.

The retirement age for retained fire fighters is 55 with an extended period to age 58 subject to a formal application process including a compulsory medical assessment.

A collective agreement was reached between the Local Government Management Services Board and the trade unions involved (SIPTU and ATGWU) in November 2002. This collective agreement provided, inter alia, for the appointment of an Expert Group which in turn would advise as to the retirement age for retained firefighters. The Expert Group's Report on Retirement Age recommended that the retirement age for retained firefighters remain at 55, with provision for an annual extension, subject to medical assessment, up to 58 years of age. Following the report of the Expert Group published in April 2003, a circular was issued by my Department in November 2003 setting out the age requirements in relation to retained firefighters in line with the Expert Report.

In general, any changes proposed by either management or unions are negotiated using the established Industrial Relations processes. In this regard, the matter of increasing the retirement age for firefighters was included as part of recent discussions on a wide range of issues at the Workplace Relations Commission, between the Local Government Management Agency (representing the employers) and SIPTU.

I understand that these discussions are at a preliminary stage and therefore I am unable to give an indication as to when these discussions will be completed or the likely outcome.

Homeless Persons Data

352. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of homeless families in County Kildare; the number of families in emergency accommodation or awaiting allocation thereto; if funding has been allocated to Kildare County Council to address the issue on a permanent basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29626/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Pathway Accommodation and Support System (PASS) was implemented nationally in 2014, as a national information and management system for homeless services that are overseen by housing authorities. My Department collates PASS data from lead housing authorities on a monthly basis and these monthly homeless reports are published on my Department's website and can be accessed using the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/other/homelessness-data>.

The report for the Mid-East Region for May showed that 48 families accessed emergency accommodation in the region during the relevant count week in May 2018. The Mid-East includes Kildare, Meath and Wicklow; however, the report does not include a breakdown at the county level for families.

Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of accommodation and related services for homeless persons rests with housing authorities. Exchequer funding towards the opera-

tional costs of homeless accommodation and related services is provided by my Department to housing authorities on a regional basis. The Mid-East Region's 2018 Exchequer funding allocation under the delegated protocol arrangements for homeless services is €1,200,000. This is the Exchequer allocation towards costs incurred by housing authorities in providing homeless services; housing authorities must provide additional funding, amounting to no less than 10% of the cost of the service being funded, from their own resources.

The funding needs of the various regions are kept under review on an ongoing basis and further recoupsments will be considered on the basis of expenditure arising.

The delivery of increased social housing will be key to providing permanent solutions for those currently experiencing homelessness. Rebuilding Ireland, the Government's Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness, includes targets to increase the number of social housing homes by 50,000 by 2021. Each local authority has been allocated a target for the delivery of social housing. The target for Kildare County Council for 2018 is for the delivery of 374 homes under build, acquisition and leasing and a further 728 housing supports under HAP and RAS.

Local Authority Functions

353. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the section in legislation in relation to the role of the chief executives of local authorities in respect of public health; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29696/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Local authorities operate in accordance with a broad range of legislation, including in relation to issues which come under the responsibility of a number of Government Departments.

In relation to the Deputy's specific query regarding public health issues, many functions in this area are now the responsibility of the Health Service Executive. However, there may still be roles that the local authorities perform that might be considered to fall within the public health realm. If the Deputy provides further detail on the specific public health function he is interested in, I will arrange for the issue to be examined without delay.

Departmental Contracts

354. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of times her Department has engaged polling companies and or Irish market researchers to conduct research on its behalf in each of the past two years; the names of such companies; the costs associated with same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29570/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I am advised that my Department has not engaged polling companies or market researchers during the period in question.

Invasive Plant Species

355. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the measures being taken to manage and resolve the issue of Japanese knotweed in County Louth; her plans to introduce measures or grant schemes to assist landowners that have an in-

festation of Japanese knotweed to eradicate it in view of the fact that it is costly and onerous on landowners without such a scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29622/18]