

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].

Illegal Dumping

1. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the status of the proposed changes to laws and regulations to deal with illegal dumping on the Curragh Plains; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35676/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Legislation regarding illegal dumping is primarily a matter in the first instance for the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

There are a wide range of challenges and issues to be addressed when dealing with the Curragh which is approximately 4,870 acres in area and is one of the most open and accessible areas in the country.

The Curragh Forum agreed that a review of the Curragh Bye-Laws and the Curragh of Kildare Act would be timely, with a view to identifying possible amendments that could potentially provide more effective solutions to the issues of illegal encampments, illegal dumping, illegal parking and other key issues.

The response to illegal dumping is managed by the Department land staff and our environmental maintenance contractor in cooperation with the County Kildare Litter Warden, and in line with the obligations of the Litter Pollution Acts 1997 - 2009. As I have alluded to previously, given the size and openness of the Curragh Plains it is difficult to prevent this activity. However, it is dealt with expeditiously once it has been identified.

Permanent Structured Co-operation

2. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he will address concerns that Ireland's participation in PESCO is undermining the triple lock guarantees protecting Irish neutrality; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35722/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) has no implications for Ireland's policy of military neutrality.

The triple lock mechanism (UN mandate, Government and Dáil approval), is the decision making process under which contingents of the Permanent Defence Force may be deployed overseas on international peace support and crisis management operations. PESCO relates to an EU mechanism for the development of defence capabilities. They are two entirely separate issues and participation in PESCO has no implications for the triple lock decision mechanism.

The PESCO participation criteria expressly stipulate that PESCO will be undertaken in full compliance with the Treaty on European Union and the associated protocols and will respect

the Member States' constitutional provisions. The European treaties require that the EU respects the specific and different policies of Member States in the area of security and defence and that has not been changed or compromised by our participation in PESCO.

PESCO was specifically referenced in the Lisbon Treaty Protocol, and in Ireland's national declaration, to address the concerns of the Irish People. The Legislation setting down Ireland's approval process for PESCO was published in advance of that Vote and enacted in November 2009. The Defence Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 2009 required Government and Dáil approval for participation in PESCO, both of which were secured before Ireland notified its intention to participate in PESCO.

While we choose to remain neutral, this is not out of any lack of interest in issues underpinning conflicts or any isolationist stance. Ireland's approach to international relations is founded on full and active engagement in the international community in support of international peace and security and the rule of law. We follow and will continue to follow this policy approach - militarily neutral but fully engaged – because, as committed members of the United Nations, we subscribe fully to the principles set out in the UN Charter.

The establishment of PESCO represents a further development in EU Cooperation in support of international peace and security under Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). Under PESCO, Member States will come together in different groups to develop and make available additional capabilities and enablers for peacekeeping and crisis management operations. It is important to note that participation in any PESCO project is on an "opt in" basis and is therefore entirely voluntary.

It is also worth noting that three other neutral EU Member States - Finland, Sweden and Austria - have also joined PESCO.

Defence Forces Expenditure

3. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the amount spent in each of the past four years on the import and export of arms and weapons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35723/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The primary focus for the purchase of equipment by the Department of Defence is to maintain the capability of the Defence Forces so as to fulfil the roles as assigned by Government. Ireland's ongoing active participation in a range of overseas peacekeeping missions is a key policy requirement. In this regard, as part of the overall approach to investing in the maintenance and development of military equipment and platform capabilities, the purchase of weapons affords the greatest possible essential force protection to Irish troops whilst on such missions.

Subhead A8 Defence Forces Capability Development, of Vote 36 Defence, makes provision for the acquisition and upgrade of Defensive Equipment including Aircraft, Naval Vessels, Armoured

Vehicles and Ammunition. Expenditure under this Subhead in 2017 and the corresponding figures for earlier years are set out in the table.

Year	Expenditure
2017	€72.7m
2016	€78.8m

2015	€71.7m
2014	€84.5m
Total	€307.7

The Department of Defence does not engage in the export of weapons.

I am satisfied that the Defence Forces have the necessary resources available to them including a modern and effective range of equipment which is in line with best international standards in order to fulfil all roles assigned to them by Government.

Commemorative Medals

4. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to issue the 1916 Centenary Commemorative Medal to veterans of the Defence Forces in recognition of their service to the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35762/18]

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

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

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

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

Naval Service Staff

5. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence further to Parliamentary Question No. 50 of 12 July 2018, if the figures provided include those on leave prior to being discharged and those that have been granted transfers to the Army. [35832/18]

10. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of enlisted Naval Service members with discharges pending as of 1 August 2018. [35885/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 5 and 10 together.

I have been advised by the military authorities that the figures provided in Parliamentary Question No. 50 of 12th July 2018, do not include the following:

- those on leave prior to discharge,
- transfers to the Army,
- transfers to the First Line Reserve.

The military authorities have advised that, as at 01 August 2018 there were 37 discharges pending for enlisted Naval Service personnel and, of these, 15 discharges were awaiting final approval and for date of discharge to be set.

With the support of the Chief of Staff I am committed to ensuring that the Defence Forces can continue to operate effectively across all roles assigned by Government, both at home and overseas. I am satisfied that membership of the Defence Forces remains an attractive career prospect for men and women who wish to serve their country.

Naval Service Staff

6. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if it is Defence Forces policy that all those that leave the Naval Service engage in an exit interview; if records of these interviews are collected; if so, if those records are ever reviewed to detect patterns that may be driving persons to leave; and if an audit of records of exit interviews has ever been conducted in order to ensure that proper records are being kept. [35833/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Military life places unique physical and psychological demands on individuals and, given the rigours of military life, there is understandably a relatively high level of turnover among Defence Forces personnel. This is not new and the Permanent Defence Force has always had a level of turnover that exceeds other areas of the public service. This is a feature of military organisations internationally.

Exit questionnaires are given to personnel by the Defence Forces as part of the administrative processing of their departure. Completion of such questionnaires, which are anonymous and confidential, is voluntary but personnel are encouraged to do so. Additionally, voluntary exit interviews are conducted on certain personnel.

The military authorities have advised that records of surveys and interviews are regularly reviewed in order to assist with the identification of trends and explanations for personnel leaving the organisation and that an audit of the records has been conducted. While this information is analysed by the Defence Forces, any conclusions must take into account the voluntary nature of this information and gaps that may exist in providing a comprehensive account of the reasons for departure.

Defence Forces Pensions

7. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the responsibilities of officials in his Department with regard to disclosure of the terms and conditions of the Defence Forces spouses' and children's contributory pension schemes to serving and retired Defence Forces members and to potential beneficiaries. [35869/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Department of Defence is responsible for the dissemination of information regarding the terms and conditions of all Defence Forces Pensions Schemes, including the relevant Spouses and Children's Contributory Pension Schemes.

Booklets setting out the terms and conditions of the Schemes, including the Spouses and Children's Pensions, are available from the Pensions Administration Section of the Department. These booklets are distributed to all Defence Forces personnel through the normal military channels and are available on the Defence Forces intranet site IKON. They are also available on the Department's recently upgraded website.

In addition, in the event of the death of a member or retired member of the Defence Forces, the Department examines the case to establish if any spouse's or children's pension entitlements exist and writes to the potential beneficiary, as appropriate.

The Department also provides briefings on pension matters to retiring Defence Forces personnel at a number of pre-retirement courses held throughout the year.

The Department is currently reviewing the dissemination of Defence Forces pensions information to serving personnel.

White Paper on Defence

8. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if associations (details supplied) will be invited to make submissions on a veterans' policy to the working groups set up by officials from his Department and from the Defence Forces to review progress in implementing the recommendations as published in the White Paper on Defence in August 2015. [35870/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): In accordance with the White Paper on Defence, the Department of Defence and the Defence Forces recently commenced work on the first of a three yearly cycle of defence reviews. The current review, which does not include an open consultation process, will consider developments since the publication of the White Paper in 2015 and will examine overall progress on its implementation, including veterans policy commitments. In this regard, the existing structures whereby regular meetings take place between representatives of the veterans' organisations and officials from my Department and the Defence Forces, will continue to be utilised to discuss matters of mutual interest and for raising any issues of concern.

Commemorative Medals

9. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the status of his engagements with groups representing retired Defence Forces members regarding the awarding of commemorative 1916 medals; if he will reconsider the decision not to award the medals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35876/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): As I advised

the Deputy in my reply to PQ21815/18 on 17th May 2018, there are no plans to award the 1916 Centenary Commemorative Medal to former members of the Defence Forces. Since the foundation of the State many thousands of personnel have served in the Defence Forces. It would not be administratively possible within the resources of the Department to identify and contact all of these persons, decide on eligibility and, in the case of infirm or deceased former members, resolve who should get the medal on their behalf.

I outlined in my reply on 17th May 2018, the engagements my Department and I have had with the Veterans Associations (the Irish United Nations Veterans Association (IUNVA), the Organisation of National Ex-Service Personnel (ONE), and the Association of Retired Commissioned Officers (ARCO)). Discussions took place to explore alternative means of recognition of the contribution of veterans to the centenary commemorative events in 2016.

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

Question No. 10 answered with Question No. 5.

Defence Forces Training

11. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if the After Action Review for 148 Platoon recruit training and three star course and the results of same will be released; if other after action reviews have taken place into recruit and-or cadet training standards since May 2016; if so, the results of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35922/18]

12. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he is satisfied that the Defence Forces Directorate of Training Lessons Learned cell is staffed and functioning correctly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35923/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 11 and 12 together.

I am informed by the military authorities that After Action Reviews are conducted following the completion of all courses in the Defence Forces, including recruit and Cadet training, as a constituent part of the organisation's Lessons Learned policy.

The aim of the Defence Forces Lessons Learned policy is to promote organisational learning in order to improve the effectiveness of Defence Forces' decision-making, the development of doctrine and planning and conduct of operations/training.

The policy is designed to enhance security, education, efficiency and exercises as well as managerial practices and resource management. The internal dissemination of best practice is a key objective and an integral component of the Lessons Learned process.

The Defence Forces does not comment on individual course after-action reviews, their contents, or any of the specifics of the individual courses for reasons of operational security.

Finally, the military authorities inform me that the Lessons Learned Cell is functioning correctly and is staffed in accordance with the establishment.

Defence Forces Recruitment

13. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if there have been meetings between military authorities and his departmental officials in relation to reducing the level of, or abolishing, psychometric testing as an entry requirement to the Defence Forces since May 2016; if so, the number of meetings that took place; the person that initiated each of these meetings; the pretext under which the meetings took place; if minutes were taken at these meetings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35924/18]

14. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if there have been meetings between military authorities and his departmental officials with the company that provides psychometric testing to the Defence Forces; the purpose of these meetings; if minutes were taken at these meetings; the outcome of the meetings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35925/18]

15. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if a decision has been made to reduce the level of, or to abolish, psychometric and-or colour blindness testing as an entry requirement to the Defence Forces; the independent expert advice sought and received in this regard; if the experience of other military forces was considered as part of this decision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35926/18]

16. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if a decision has been made to reduce the level of, or to abolish, psychometric and-or colour blindness testing as an entry requirement to the Defence Forces; if an independent review will be undertaken to determine whether these decisions have potential negative impact on Defence Forces training standards, health and safety incidents and operational outcomes in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35927/18]

17. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if applicants that failed psychometric testing and-or colour blindness testing were subsequently admitted to the Defence Forces; if so, the number of applicants accepted by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35928/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 13 to 17, inclusive, together.

The conditions for entry to and service in the Permanent Defence Force, including the methodologies used for assessments, are subject to continuous review and modification having regard to the needs of the organisation and the development of best practices.

Psychometric testing and colour vision testing continue to form part of the induction and candidate assessment process. Following its introduction in 2012 for general service recruits, the military authorities have revised the approach to psychometric testing a number of times. During that time the Defence Forces engaged the services of various psychometric testing companies for the purposes of administering tests to the different inductions streams (General Service, Cadetships, Apprenticeships and Direct Entry Schemes). The result of a psychometric test is a factor in determining overall suitability for admission to the Permanent Defence Force.

The issue of colour vision deficiency is a complex one particularly in relation to ensuring a safe work environment. The Defence Forces continue to consider how they could support

personnel, who have colour vision deficiency, in areas such as medical standards, career progression, career streaming and operational availability.

Senior civil and military management meet frequently to discuss different aspects of the recruitment process in order to ensure that the various processes are as efficient as possible and optimised to the needs of the Defence Forces.

Within this framework, Departmental officials and the military authorities have met with representatives of the company which currently provides psychometric testing to the Defence Forces. The purpose of this meeting was to enhance the understanding of the revised psychometric testing process. I am informed that no minutes of this meeting were circulated between the attendees.

The current recruitment and induction process is kept under on-going review to ensure it continues to effectively determine suitability for entry to the Defence Forces.

Defence Forces Ombudsman

18. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if the Defence Forces Ombudsman's 2016 recommendation that appropriate investigation arrangements need to be established and agreed with his Department, including procedures for compliance with the production of information provisions of section 8 of the Ombudsman (Defence Forces) Act 2004, have been implemented; and if so, when it was implemented. [36104/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): In his 2016 Annual Report, the then Ombudsman for the Defence Forces recommended a review of the Defence Act, 1954 and the Ombudsman (Defence Forces) Act 2004, in light of the experience gained by his Office since its establishment in 2005. Among the issues raised in this regard, was a suggestion regarding the establishment of appropriate investigation arrangements with my Department to comply with the production of information provisions in section 8 of the 2004 Act.

The underlying working assumption in all dealings by staff of my Department with the office of the Ombudsman for the Defence Forces remains one of co-operation and a willingness to assist him or her in his or her tasks. The Ombudsman (Defence Forces) Act 2004 assigns to a person to whom a requirement to produce information is addressed, the status of a witness before the High Court with attendant immunities and privileges. As these requirements are reflective of those in the Ombudsman Act, 1980, the arrangements in place are considered consistent with the norms in this area.

Defence Forces Ombudsman Complaints

19. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if outstanding administrative and systemic reforms recommended by the Defence Forces Ombudsman have been audited; if so, the most recent date on which they were audited; and the number and percentage of reforms the audit found were still outstanding. [36105/18]

20. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of recommendations made by the Defence Forces Ombudsman in complaint cases which were not implemented in each of the years 2010 to 2017 and to date in 2018. [36106/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 19 and 20 together.

Since 2013, my Department provides the Ombudsman for the Defence Forces with a quarterly progress report on outstanding systemic issues highlighted by the Ombudsman in his or her final reports.

The most recent of these was prepared in October 2017 for discussion with the Office of the Defence Forces Ombudsman and at that time the implementation of nine recommendations was ongoing. The previous Ombudsman's term of office expired on 6th November 2017 and a new Ombudsman took up office on the 6th July, 2018. Accordingly, no quarterly reports were prepared in the intervening period and this process will be reconvened with a progress report to be prepared for discussion in October.

Defence Forces Ombudsman Complaints

21. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if recommendations made by the Defence Forces Ombudsman following its adjudication on a complaint are binding; and if not, the reason therefor; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36107/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Office of the Ombudsman for the Defence Forces was established under the provisions of the Ombudsman (Defence Forces) Act 2004 and provides both serving and former members of the Defence Forces with an impartial and independent review of their grievances. Under the provisions of the Act, the Ombudsman may conduct an independent investigation into an action that is the subject of a complaint and then, following deliberation on the matter, send a statement in writing of the results to the Minister and all persons concerned with the complaint and also to any other person to whom he or she considers appropriate.

Under section 7(3) of the Act, where the Ombudsman finds that the action complained of adversely affected the Complainant, he or she may make recommendations to the Minister:

- a) that further action is required
- b) that measures or specified measures be taken to remedy, mitigate or alter the adverse effect of the action, or
- c) that the reasons for taking the action be given

While there is no provision within the Act of 2004 whereby the recommendations are legally binding, the recommendations of the Ombudsman for the Defence Forces are given full consideration.

Pesticide Use

22. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the pesticide that was used by the Defence Forces at camps during overseas missions in each of the years 2008 to 2017 and to date in 2018. [36120/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I am advised by the Defence Forces that they have no records available on the use of pesticides at camps during overseas missions in each of the years 2008 to 2017.

In respect of 2018 to date, there is a record of one pesticide being used in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). This is a herbicide (chemical weed killer) currently in

use for vegetation control in UNIFIL, where a glyphosate based weed killer is in use, the brand name is Tripazone.

I am also advised that commercial rodenticides are occasionally used in camp to control the rodent population. This pest control service is provided by UNIFIL and details of the pesticides used by UNIFIL are not held by the Defence Forces.

Defence Forces Health And Safety Risk Management Procedures sets out the Risk

Assessment and Controls necessary in the use of hazardous substances such as pesticides including weed killers. Each use of weed killer is thus subject to a risk assessment to ensure that its application is safe and that the manufacturers instructions are followed by the user, including eye, hand, body and respiratory protection as appropriate.

It is not currently proposed to discontinue the use of weedkillers but this matter, including the selection of specific weedkillers, will be kept under review in light of the recent debate on the issue.

Defence Forces Allowances

23. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the allowances paid to members of the Defence Forces for duties related to the Papal visit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36190/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Unlike other areas of the Public Service and due to the nature of the duties performed, overtime or shift allowance are not available to members of the Defence Forces. In its place a weekly Military Service Allowance (MSA) is paid to all ranks up to the level of Colonel. Military Service Allowance is designed to compensate for the special conditions associated with military life. These include unsocial hours of duty, exposure to danger, and the restrictions inherent in military discipline. For Privates, Corporals and Sergeants with more 3 years in service, MSA is worth €115.43 per week, per person. For Senior NCOs the rate is €122.87 per week.

In line with any other occasion when the Defence Forces are requested to operate in an Aid to the Civil Power - i.e. supporting An Garda Síochána - Defence Force members on duty in support of An Garda Síochána during the Papal visit will receive Security Duty Allowance (SDA). The current rates of SDA is €23.81 for each day on duty for less than 24 hours. The rate is increased to €47.59 for a 24 hour duty. Security Duty allowance is paid to all enlisted personnel and to officers up to and including the rank of Commandant.

Defence Forces Personnel Data

24. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of members of the Defence Forces on duty related to the Papal visit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36191/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Department of Justice and Equality and An Garda Síochána have primary responsibility for the internal security of the State. Among the roles assigned to the Defence Forces in the White Paper on Defence is the provision of Aid to the Civil Power which, in practice, means to assist An Garda Síochána when requested to do so. On each occasion that the support of the Defence Forces is required, An Garda Síochána issues a form C70 to the Defence Forces to request their as-

sistance. The Gardaí requested support from the Defence Forces for the Papal Visit and the number of members of the Defence Forces deployed in support of it was 3,104.

The assistance provided by the Defence Forces for the duration of the Papal visit is greatly appreciated and acknowledged by myself and my colleagues in Government.

Naval Service Operations

25. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence further to Parliamentary Question No. 39 of 3 July 2018, if a picture (details supplied) was taken on the *LÉ Niamh* on 5 August 2015, in view of other images posted by the Naval Service and dated the same day which show the same details on the floor, the canopy and the particular blankets used on the ship that day. [36195/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence(Deputy Paul Kehoe): In responding to Parliamentary Question No. 39 of 3 July 2018, based on advice I had received from the Defence Forces, I stated that “in the course of the event in question on 5 August 2015 involving the *LE Niamh*, no wristbands were applied to persons rescued by personnel on *LE Niamh*. I am also advised that the Naval Service cannot stand over the provenance of the photograph used in the article in question and which is credited to “Irish Navy””. I regret that the information afforded to me and which I communicated to the House in good faith at the time, was incorrect.

On foot of the Deputies further question, I asked that the matter be further investigated. I am now advised by the Naval Service that the pictures supplied were actually taken on board *LÉ Niamh* during the time it was rescuing migrants under Operation Pontus. I am also advised that the wristband displayed in the photograph provided was applied by Naval Service personnel on board the *L.É. Niamh*.

I am further advised that during Search and Rescue (SAR) operations undertaken in the Mediterranean, the standing operational procedure was that, as rescued persons came on board, each one was photographed and given a numbered wristband as part of their processing on board, which also included medical examination and assessment. This procedure was to account for rescued persons on-board. In addition, persons of interest, namely those persons in control of the migrant vessels and potential people traffickers, were identified as part of this process.

On the 5th of August, 2015, as the Deputy will recall, there was a very significant rescue event in the Mediterranean where a fishing vessel carrying migrants capsized and several hundred migrants ended up in the water. Given the massive scale and urgency of the rescue operation, the Executive Officer on *LE NIAMH* made the decision, when the first RHIB returned with rescued persons to the ship, that the ship’s staff would not register embarked persons as per normal standing operational procedure, as saving lives was the main focus of their efforts and the rescued persons could be registered later. The *LÉ Niamh* rescued 367 persons (342 male, 12 female and 13 children). 25 bodies were also recovered and taken on board.

On transit to Italy, the Naval Service deck parties were approached by rescued persons who identified a number of persons as the people who were in control of the fishing vessel. These men were tagged and their photographs taken while on board *LE Niamh*. The witnesses that came forward were also given wristbands. The purpose of this was to identify both groups of people amongst the 365 persons that were on-board at the time.

A number of persons were subsequently charged by the Italian authorities in connection with this incident. A Mutual Legal Assistance request was received by the Central Authority

for Mutual Assistance in the Department of Justice and Equality from the Italian authorities. On foot of this request the prosecuting authorities in Italy were provided with photographic and video evidence of the event held by the Naval Service and a member of the Naval Service gave evidence in Italy attesting to the validity of that evidence.

I trust this clarifies the matter. I very much regret that incorrect information was supplied in my previous response to Dáil Question No. 39 of 3 July 2018 and I am happy to have this opportunity to correct the record.

Commemorative Medals

26. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to sanction the awarding of medals (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36268/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Programme for Government provided for the award of the 1916 Commemorative medal to all Defence Forces personnel, Permanent and Reserve, who were recorded as being in service in the course of 2016. This was a special acknowledgement from the Government to the members of Óglaigh na hÉireann who served during the centenary year of 2016.

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

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

Following these discussions, it was agreed that a single presentation would be made to each of the Veterans Associations of a framed medal with an accompanying citation in recognition of the significant contribution of members of the three organisations to the 1916 centenary commemorative events and their service to the State.

I also agreed that a plaque would be given to each of IUNVA's 21 Posts and to each of O.N.E.'s 41 Branches. I presented one plaque to each of the three Veterans' Associations at last year's Defence Forces' Veterans' Day which took place in the Defence Forces Training Centre, the Curragh, on Sunday 8 October 2017. The other plaques were subsequently provided to the Associations for distribution to each of their individual branches/posts.

White Paper on Defence

27. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he will report on the implementation of the recommendations of the 2000 and 2015 White Papers on defence; when the balance of the recommendations will be implemented in full; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36372/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The first White Paper on Defence was published in February 2000. This was an important milestone that recognised the requirement for a coherent and clearly articulated Defence policy. In addition to confirming the roles of the Defence Forces and providing a policy framework, it set out specific recommendations for change, re-organisation and investment throughout the Defence Organisation. A review of its implementation was carried out by a civil-military group and their report was published in February 2007. This concluded that the goals outlined in the White Paper were being achieved and that the challenges that had emerged since 2000 were being met.

Following Government approval to prepare a new White Paper on Defence, the then Minister for Defence published a Green Paper on Defence in July 2013 and in doing so initiated a broad public consultative process. This was considered necessary as the White Paper 2000 had provided Ireland's defence policy framework and development strategy for over a decade. A new policy framework was required to reflect the many changes that had occurred in the defence and security environment at global, regional and domestic levels since 2000. As such, the latest White Paper, which was published in 2015, provides the current defence policy agenda over a ten year planning horizon and encompasses all work carried out by the Department of Defence, the Defence Forces and Civil Defence. It comprehends the Government's policy on defence of the State from armed aggression, the defence contribution to domestic security, the defence contribution to international peace and security and a broad range of other "non-security" roles which the Government require the Defence Forces and Civil Defence to undertake. It considers the defence capabilities required so that the Defence Forces can successfully deliver on the roles assigned by Government. Finally, the White Paper also considers implementation and the actions required to ensure that defence planning and provision processes are further developed.

During scoping of the White Paper implementation programme 88 actions or projects were specifically identified. These actions represent a subset of the totality of the work being carried out as part of the implementation programme for the White Paper. While it is currently intended to have all 88 projects initiated or completed by the end of the ten year implementation programme, work in certain areas will continue beyond 2025 in order to ensure that changes, improvements and actions envisaged in the White Paper are fully implemented and to assure that positive outcomes endure and are embedded in the day to day business of the Defence Organisation.

To date, 37 projects have been initiated with 10 more projects due to initiate during 2018. Of these, 6 projects have been completed and closed/transitioned to normal business with a number of other projects close to completion.

Departmental Communications

28. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the positions in his Department and the organisations under its aegis that have arrangements in place for lo-call numbers or 1800, 1850 and 1890 telephone numbers for members of the public to contact his Department or organisations under its aegis; the number of these that are completely free to call for persons who use mobile telephones and may incur major bills phoning such organisations; if the situation will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36396/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Department of Defence and the organisations under its aegis have no 1800, 1850 or phone numbers that are completely free to call. We have four 1890 numbers – two for contacting the Department's offices, one for contacting the Office of Emergency Planning and one for contacting the Ombudsman for the Defence Forces.

The 1890 numbers are listed on the contact pages of the Department's websites. For each of the 1890 numbers there are also national landline numbers listed alongside the 1890 numbers. This allows members of the public to choose their preferred method of contacting the Department. The costs of calling 1890 or national landline numbers will vary depending on the landline or mobile phone provider.

Having regard to the nature of the Department's business, I am satisfied that the option to use an 1890 number or a national landline number provides members of the public with an appropriate means to contact the Department and the organisations under its aegis. The situation is not currently under review.

Defence Forces Properties

29. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if funding has been provided for the upgrading of the apprentice hostel at Baldonnel; when works on this project will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36421/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Infrastructure projects are undertaken at military installations as part of the ongoing Defence Forces Built Infrastructure programme. The programme is designed to modernise and enhance the training, operational and accommodation facilities available to members of the Defence Forces. The programme is implemented by the Department on a priority needs basis in consultation with the Military Authorities.

The capital element of the programme focuses mainly on infrastructural projects comprising the construction of new buildings and the refurbishment of existing buildings and facilities where appropriate.

A project to upgrade the Apprentice Hostel, Casement Aerodrome, Baldonnel, Co. Dublin is currently underway. Work on design and planning for this project is well advanced, with a Design Team appointed and the tender process for the works currently underway.

It is anticipated that the tender evaluation process and contract signing will be completed by January 2019 and that construction works will commence shortly thereafter, subject to approval of the award of contract and the capital provision for the built infrastructure programme for 2019.

Defence Forces Museums

30. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence further to Parliamentary Question No. 66 of 1 May 2018, when the matter being investigated will be completed; the up to date information in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36472/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I can advise the Deputy that the Defence Forces have carried out an investigation into the origins and provenance of this military artefact. As the Deputy will be aware the cannon in question has been in the possession of the Defence Forces for over sixty years and was previously on display in Devoy Barracks, Naas. In 1998 the Minister for Defence wrote to Naas Urban District Council informing them that on completion of the refurbishment of the cannon it would not be returned to Naas but would be displayed in the Curragh Camp thereafter. The cannon is currently on

display in a secure indoor location in the DFTC Museum in the Curragh. It is not intended to relocate the Cannon from its current location which is accessible to members of the public.

Defence Forces Remuneration

31. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to increase pay for the Defence Forces in budget 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36673/18]

36. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the level of reduction to each of the allowances in the Defence Forces since 2008; if these cuts are part of FEMPI legislation; the provision for restoration of the cuts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36679/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 31 and 36 together.

Amongst other pay adjustments, the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (No. 2) Act 2009, provided for a 5% reduction in fixed rate allowances payable to public servants in receipt of basic pay not exceeding €125,000. In this regard, certain Defence Forces allowances were reduced by 5% with effect from 1 January 2010.

In accordance with the Public Service Stability Agreement, 2013-2016, (the Haddington Road Agreement), all sectors across the public service were required to contribute to additional pay and productivity measures. Other sectors delivered these savings through a variety of approaches including additional working time and reduced rates of overtime payments.

The contribution from the Defence sector included a further reduction of 10% on the rate of certain allowances payable to the Defence Forces. As part of the cost saving measures to be secured under the agreement, it was also agreed with the Representative Associations that the Saturday and Sunday rates for Security Duty Allowance would be flat rated.

Defence Forces pay is increasing in accordance with public sector pay agreements. The Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020, which was considered and accepted by the Permanent Defence Force Representative Associations, provides for further increases in pay, ranging from 6.2% to 7.4% over the lifetime of the Agreement, with the focus of the agreement once again being on the lower paid. An increase of 1% due from 1 January 2018 has been paid to Permanent Defence Force personnel and a second increase is due to be applied from 1 October 2018.

In 2019, a 1% increase is due to be paid from 1 January for all those on annualised salaries up to €30,000. A further 1.75% increase in annualised salaries is due for all public servants (including Defence Forces personnel) from 1 September 2019.

By the end of the agreement (end 2020), the pay scales of all public servants encompassed by the Agreement, (including members of the Permanent Defence Force), earning up to €70,000, will be restored to pre-FEMPI levels. The restoration of the 5% reduction to allowances is also scheduled in the agreement.

Overseas Missions Data

32. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if Defence

Forces missions are planned to Mali; if so, the number to be deployed; if Lariam has been purchased for the purposes of the deployment; if so, the quantities of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36675/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Ireland is contributing troops to the European Union Training mission in Mali since 2013 and our current contribution stands at twenty (20) personnel. Continued participation in this mission supports Irelands ongoing obligations to international peace and security and the commitment to maintaining the Defence Forces capabilities in international operations.

The choice of medication for overseas deployment is a medical decision made by Medical Officers in the Defence Forces having regard to the specific circumstances of the mission and the individual member of the Defence Forces.

I am advised that pharmaceuticals are purchased by the Defence Forces on a demand basis.

Defence Forces Operations

33. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if there are restrictions on military leave for the week commencing 18 September 2018; the barracks and number affected; the reasons for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36676/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The day-to-day operational management of Defence Forces personnel is a matter, in the first instance, for the appropriate military authorities. The Defence Forces operates on a 24 hours a day, 365 days a year basis and this means that, on occasion, military leave has to be restricted for operational reasons.

The approval of annual leave is a matter for the military authorities in line with the operational requirements of the Defence Forces. The Ministerial Review of the 58th Infantry Group who are due to deploy to UNDOF the following week will be held on 19 September. The Air Corp's Annual General Officer Commanding inspection will take place on 21 September 2018 and some units will hold Unit Inspections on 17 and 18 September 2018.

Defence Forces Strength

34. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the way in which the recommended establishment figure for the Defence Forces is calculated; if it is based on population density or other considerations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36677/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The establishment figures for the Permanent Defence Force (PDF), the Army Reserve (AR) and the Naval Service Reserve (NSR) are set on the basis of the operational requirements to ensure that the Defence Forces can meet the roles assigned to it by Government. Other considerations include the security environment and available funding resources.

In 2011, the Government stabilised the establishment of the PDF at 7,520 Army, 886 Air Corps and 1,094 Naval Service personnel. In 2013, the establishments of the AR and the NSR were set at 3,869 and 200 personnel respectively.

The subsequent White Paper on Defence, published in 2015, resulted from a comprehensive

examination of Defence requirements over a ten year planning horizon. Having regard to the revised assessment of the security environment, and consideration of the operational requirements needed to ensure that the Defence Forces can continue to meet all roles assigned to it in the White Paper, the Government decided to retain the PDF establishment at 9,500 and to make provision for an increase in the overarching establishment of the AR and NSR to 4,169 personnel.

Defence Forces Medicinal Products

35. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if mefloquine continues to be purchased under the four year framework agreement on the supply and pricing of medicines for use by the Defence Forces; when this agreement is due to expire; if the Defence Forces plan to renew the agreement; if the agreement stipulates the quantity of mefloquine to be provided; if this quantity will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36678/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I have sought an update from the military authorities in regard to this matter. I will revert to the Deputy as soon as the information is to hand.

Question No. 36 answered with Question No. 31.

Defence Forces Operations

37. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the steps he will take to address the concerns of the Defence Forces regarding pay and conditions for deployment during the Papal visit in respect of the provision of overtime payments and safe working conditions; the number of Defence Forces staff deployed during the Papal visit; if he has met with members of the Defence Forces about their concerns; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36680/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Department of Justice and Equality and An Garda Síochána have primary responsibility for the internal security of the State. Among the roles assigned to the Defence Forces in the White Paper on Defence is the provision of Aid to the Civil Power (ATCP) which, in practice, means to assist An Garda Síochána when requested to do so.

The Gardaí requested ATCP assistance from the Defence Forces in support of the Papal Visit and the number of members of the Defence Forces deployed was 3,104.

Unlike other areas of the Public Service and due to the nature of the duties performed, overtime is not available to members of the Defence Forces. In its place a Military Service Allowance (MSA) is paid to all ranks up to the level of Colonel. Military Service Allowance is designed to compensate for the special conditions associated with military life. These include unsocial hours of duty, exposure to danger, and the restrictions inherent in military discipline. For Privates, Corporals and Sergeants with more than 3 years in service, MSA is worth €115.43 per week, per person. For Senior NCOs the rate is €122.87 per week.

In line with any other occasion when the Defence Forces are requested to operate in an Aid to the Civil Power, Defence Force members on duty in support of An Garda Síochána during the Papal visit will receive Security Duty Allowance (SDA). The current rates of SDA is €23.81

for each day on duty for less than 24 hours. The rate is increased to €47.59 for a 24 hour duty. Security Duty allowance is paid to all enlisted personnel and to officers up to and including the rank of Commandant.

Defence Forces personnel routinely encounter difficult conditions when deployed operationally, personnel are trained and equipped to have the resilience to deal with the conditions in order to successfully complete their mission.

I can confirm that I engage with the Defence Forces on an ongoing basis.

The assistance provided by the Defence Forces for the duration of the Papal visit is greatly appreciated and acknowledged by myself and my colleagues in Government.

Defence Forces Remuneration

38. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the status of a review of pay and other issues an organisation (details supplied) was seeking to address through the conciliation process regarding the terms and conditions of members of the Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36773/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Defence (Amendment) Act 1990 and Defence Force Regulations S6 provided for the establishment of representative associations for members of the Permanent Defence Force. The associations that have since been established are RACO (for commissioned officers) and PDFORRA (for enlisted personnel).

The scheme of Conciliation and Arbitration (C&A) for members of the Permanent Defence Force provides a formal mechanism for the determination of claims and proposals from the Permanent Defence Force Representative Associations relating to remuneration and conditions of service.

Having regard to commitments made under pay agreements, members of the Permanent Defence Force can make representations in relation to their pay and conditions of service through their representative association. Where agreement is not reached it is open to both official and representative sides to refer the matter to an adjudicator or an arbitration Board to settle the matter.

Officials from my Department continue to work with the Representative Associations in a positive and collaborative process within the C&A Scheme to resolve issues. There is also ongoing engagement on a regular basis between the Official side and the Representative side on a range of items which are processed through C&A.

Matters dealt with under the C&A Scheme are confidential in nature and therefore it would not be appropriate for me to comment further.

Defence Forces Strength

39. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of personnel serving in the Permanent Defence Forces to date; the projected enlistment by the end of 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36774/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The current

strength (whole time equivalent) of the Defence Forces, as of 31 July 2018 (the latest date for which figures are available) is 8,898 personnel.

There are significant recruitment opportunities available in the Defence Forces, at both enlisted and officer level, for eligible individuals who wish to have a rewarding and positive career in service to the State. A general service recruitment campaign, the 2018 officer cadetships competition, a competition for Air Corps apprentices and the 2018 RDF recruitment campaigns all took place in the first half of this year and the applications from these various competitions are being progressed.

Arising from the general service recruitment campaign held earlier this year, new recruits will be inducted between September and December. Army Cadet intake will commence on 24 September. Final figures for numbers enlisted in 2018 will not be available until later in the year.

International Agreements

40. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if Ireland has an active status of forces agreement with the United States of America; if so, the date that this agreement was signed; and if he will provide a copy of same. [36093/18]

41. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if there is an international status of force agreement in place whereby crimes committed by forces of the United States of America here will not be prosecuted here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36674/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 40 and 41 together.

Ireland has not concluded a Status of Forces Agreement with the United States.

United States military personnel transiting or visiting Ireland are under a duty to respect Irish law.

As with all other States, only military personnel duly accredited through their Embassy, under the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations of 1961 have a legal status that is governed by the Diplomatic Relations and Immunities Act 1967, as amended.

Middle East Issues

42. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the change in the law in Israel defining the state as a Jewish one and changing the official status of the Arabic language. [35449/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I have previously expressed my concerns about the passing of the Nation State Law in Israel. Much of the Law is declaratory in nature, and it remains to be seen how much direct impact it will have in practice. However, even on a symbolic level, it risks marginalising Israeli citizens who are not Jewish, in particular the 20% of Israeli citizens who identify as Arab or Palestinian. It sends worrying signals about their status and their right to equality in the country which is their home. Some of these Israelis have already expressed fears that the new law, which has the status of a Basic Law, may be a starting point for discrimination against minorities within Israel. There

have been public demonstrations in Israel to express concerns about this Law.

The Israeli Declaration of Independence stated that Israel will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex. For those Israelis whose first language is Arabic, the official status which that language has hitherto had is symbolically important of their status as equal citizens, as well as being important from a practical perspective. This new law sets out to privilege Jewish communities, and I know that many Israelis, both Arab and Jewish, have reacted with dismay to this.

A key point is that this new law states that "... the right to exercise national self-determination in the State of Israel is unique to the Jewish people". Nobody is denying the strong connection between the Jewish people and Israel. But Israel is also a home to many who are not Jewish, and this law sends a worrying signal about their rights as Israeli citizens, and the part they have to play in Israel's democracy.

I am also particularly concerned about the references to Jewish settlement. There have been different interpretations of whether this refers to Israel only, or also to the West Bank, but the ambiguity is very unhelpful in a volatile situation. The Government is wholly opposed to the construction of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory. This language is also extremely worrying in the context of a number of pieces of legislation being proposed, and already passed, by the Knesset, which blur the lines between Israel and the West Bank.

As I said, it remains to be seen what this will mean in practice. My Department has signalled our concerns to the Israeli Embassy here, and continues to monitor the situation closely.

Departmental Contracts Data

43. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the cost of the contracting out of secure printing by his Department in 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018. [35533/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Details of costs associated with secure printing for my Department are outlined in the following table.

These costs refer to spending associated with the printing of travel documents, including passports and emergency travel documents. Such documents, by their nature, require advanced security features which are only available from a specialist printing provider.

Similarly, my Department uses secure printing for Foreign Birth Registration (FBR) certificates.

Year	Travel Documents	FBR Certificates
2016	€10,400,000	Nil
2017	€8,600,000	Nil
2018 (to date)	€3,100,000	€9,069

Foreign Conflicts

44. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the current political and military situation in the Republic of Cameroon; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35664/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): I am aware of the current political and military situation in Cameroon.

I met the Cameroon Minister for Education in February, when we discussed the situation in his country. The escalation of violence in its southwest is the most pressing threat to political stability in Cameroon.

I am particularly concerned by reports of violence against civilians. I believe that constructive dialogue remains the way towards a lasting solution to the crisis, preserving unity and peace for all the people of Cameroon. Furthermore, it is the responsibility of the Government of Cameroon to ensure free, transparent, and credible elections and strongly discourage election related violence during next month's presidential elections.

While Ireland does not have an Embassy in Cameroon, we continue to monitor the circumstances there closely. The Embassy of Ireland in Nigeria, which hosts many refugees from Cameroon, tracks the evolving situation and its regional impact, including through engagement with regional bodies. This is supplemented by ongoing contacts with the EU delegation in Yaoundé.

In this context, I recall the EEAS statement of 7 February on the situation in Cameroon, which called on all sides to refrain from acts which might exacerbate tensions. It remains the responsibility of the Government of Cameroon to create a secure environment in which all citizens are protected from violence, and where international human rights standards, including protection for minority groups, are upheld.

Ireland supports the efforts of United Nations bodies providing aid to those affected by the conflict. An Irish Aid rapid responder has been deployed to Cameroon to assist the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA).

The human rights situation in Cameroon was most recently reviewed in May by the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva, under the Universal Periodic Review mechanism. Ireland fully participated in those discussions.

Travel Documents

45. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the reason when travelling using a passport for a minor it is advised to also carry a birth certificate in view of the fact that an application for a passport for a minor has parent details; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35788/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade provides travel advice for around 200 countries on its website at www.dfa.ie/travel/travel-advice. This information is also provided through our free-to-download SmartPhone App TravelWise and via our social media presence. The information provided is continuously reviewed and updated to ensure that it is as accurate and relevant as possible. Travel Advice is developed based on assessments and reports from our Embassy and Consulate network, and material available from host countries and local authorities and agencies. My Department also liaises with other countries including EU Member States and other relevant third country sources, with the objective of ensuring that Irish citizens are able to make informed decisions regarding their travel plans.

Border enforcement or management authorities of any state are responsible for determining the documentary evidence required to permit entry and exit from that state. My Department is

aware that some jurisdictions will require that birth certificates of minors may be requested, in addition to a valid travel document and other documentation, particularly where only one parent is travelling with a minor.

My Department makes this information available on the Department's Travel Advice web-pages so that Irish citizens intending to travel with minors can make informed decisions about their travel plans. It is recommended that Irish citizens intending on travelling with minors contact the Embassy accredited to Ireland to seek further information on particular requirements that may apply.

Passport Applications Refusals

46. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the reason a person (details supplied) was refused a passport. [35948/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): All passport applications are subject to the provisions of the Passports Act, 2008 ("the Act"). This Act provides, among other things, that a person must be an Irish citizen before a passport can be issued to him/her. In order to meet this legal requirement, each person must demonstrate an entitlement to Irish citizenship in his/her application. The applicant to whom you refer is not an Irish citizen. The Department of Justice and Equality is responsible for all matters in relation to citizenship and information on how to obtain Irish citizenship is available on www.inis.gov.ie.

Foreign Conflicts

47. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the steps he is taking to call for an end to violence in Yemen; if he has requested the Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to explain recent horrific events in Yemen; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35986/18]

61. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn drawn to the air strike on a school bus in Yemen by the Saudi Arabia led military coalition on 9 August 2018 that killed 40 children; if his attention has been further drawn to another air strike by the Saudi Arabian led coalition on 24 August 2018 that killed 22 children; if these attacks and the Saudi Arabian led coalitions repeated targeting and killing of civilians and children will be condemned (details supplied); and if he will support requests to impose an arms embargo on Saudi Arabia until it ceases its military attacks in Yemen and abides by international law. [36408/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 47 and 61 together.

Yemen is currently the world's largest humanitarian crisis, with over twenty million people in need of assistance due to drought and the disruptions of war. Three years of war have had devastating consequences for civilians, with allegations of violations of human rights, international humanitarian law, and significant loss of life. Three quarters of the population are estimated to require some form of humanitarian assistance.

I, and officials in my Department, have been monitoring the state of affairs in Yemen with growing anxiety, particularly in recent weeks as multiple reports of attacks affecting civilians have circulated. I remain deeply concerned by the level of violence in Yemen, and by reports

of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. I condemn in the strongest terms all actions which endanger civilians, including those attacks referenced by the Deputies.

Officials from my Department regularly convey to the Saudi Embassy in Dublin my strong concerns in relation to the situation in Yemen, and the impact the fighting is having on civilians, especially children. They also conveyed my condemnation of missile attacks on Saudi Arabia, which also have the potential to impact on civilians. There have also been EU contacts with Saudi Arabia in relation to concerns about civilians in Yemen.

Ireland has also worked in the UN system to raise our grave concerns about human rights in Yemen. At the Human Rights Council in September 2017, Ireland was part of a small core group of countries that drove forward the adoption by consensus of a Resolution on Yemen. The resolution established a group of international experts to examine the facts in relation to violations of human rights and humanitarian law on the ground. Ireland is still examining the report of the findings of the Group of Eminent Experts on Yemen that was published last week. We look forward to discussing it further with our partners later this month at the next session of the Human Rights Council.

Ireland has provided €15.5 million in bilateral humanitarian assistance to Yemen since the conflict began in 2015. Of this, €4 million was contributed this year alone. Ireland also provides global funding to a number of organisations which are particularly active in Yemen including the World Food Programme, UNICEF and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

On the problems posed by arms transfers to conflict regions, Ireland's efforts are concentrated on universalisation and implementation of the 2014 Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), which has been signed and ratified by all EU Member States. The ATT is the first legally binding instrument to regulate the international trade in conventional weapons. States which sign up to the Treaty are prohibited from exporting arms to countries if they know those weapons will be used to commit gross violations of human rights.

I would like to assure the Deputies that Ireland will continue to take every appropriate opportunity to urge stronger international action, and will press for a negotiated settlement to the conflict in Yemen, as well as respect for human rights and international humanitarian law, and improved humanitarian access.

Citizenship Applications

48. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of an application by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36065/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): As the Deputy will be aware, my Department takes its obligations in relation to the processing of applications for citizenship by descent very seriously. The Foreign Births Registration Unit of my Department is actively examining the application referred to in the Deputy's question and, in this context, my officials are currently consulting with other Departments regarding certain aspects of it. A notification of the decision reached will be issued once the process is complete.

Rapid Response Initiative

49. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of applications by gender received by the deadline for the recent call for rapid response corps; the number that were shortlisted by gender for interview; the number selected for appointment by gender; the number of late applications received; if late applicants were admitted; the number of unsuccessful applicants that sought a re-mark; if this resulted in a change in the situation of each; if there is an independent appeal process open under the CPSA code or otherwise for unsuccessful applicants to apply to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36147/18]

50. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the way in which the assessors for the rapid response corps call were selected; the remuneration and expenses paid to them; if there was a protocol in place to deal with possible conflicts of interest; if he is satisfied that they were followed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36148/18]

51. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the percentage weight allocated to languages in the competition for the rapid response corps; the reason the languages sought are now more restrictive than in the past with, for example, Spanish not being sought despite this being a language of communication in many countries in which rapid response assistance may be sought; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36149/18]

52. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if there were safeguards in place to ensure existing members were not unfairly favoured over talented newer applicants during the application and assessment process for the recruitment of the rapid response corps; if so, the details of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36150/18]

53. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the reason for the difference in the recruitment processes for the rapid response corps which involved interviews and the election observation roster which only involves a desk review exercise of applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36151/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): I propose to take Questions Nos. 49 to 53, inclusive, together.

Under Ireland's Rapid Response Initiative, highly skilled and experienced individuals from a Rapid Response Corps, managed by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, can be rostered to provide short notice surge capacity to four UN partner organisations. A Rapid Response Strategy was developed in 2015 and governs Ireland's overall approach. This Strategy is available on the Irish Aid website.

Individual members of the Rapid Response Corps are deployed at the request of those UN humanitarian agencies with which Ireland has concluded formal bilateral Stand-by Agreements, under the UN Stand-by Partnership Programme. The four agencies with which Ireland has a Stand-by Agreement are: United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR); World Food Programme (WFP); United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA); and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

These organisations identify the specialist support required in a given emergency situation and request assistance from partners, including Ireland, in filling their skills gaps. The support they require, and skill sets they demand, varies from emergency to emergency, and have changed over time as the nature, duration and location of crises have evolved.

The Rapid Response Corps was launched in 2007. Since then, there have been over 350 deployments of expert responders from the Irish roster, with in 2017 over 4,000 days of critical support provided by Irish corps members to stand-by partners.

Against a background of increasing humanitarian need internationally, changing stand-by partner demands, and in a context where a number of people were no longer available for deployment, it became clear that the roster of skilled people available for deployment as members of the Irish Rapid Response Corps needed to be replenished and supplemented. Contacts with Ireland's UN stand-by partners identified the skillsets and expertise required, including language.

The requirements and format of 2018 selection process were set out in the Information Booklet accompanying the call for applications – we will provide a copy to the Deputy.

The recruitment was widely publicized, including in print, electronic media and radio, in order to encourage as broad a range of new and talented applicants as possible. While it is desirable that members of Ireland's Rapid Response Corps have an affinity with Ireland, the essential element is that members of the roster have the necessary skill sets to support Ireland's UN stand-by partners in their humanitarian responses. Accordingly, Irish nationality is not a requirement of roster membership. A high number of strong applications were received. Current members of the Rapid Response Corps were not required to re-apply.

The process to assess applications received was managed in accordance with established best practice. Two expert shortlisting panels and three interview panels were constituted, made up of experienced Departmental officials with a knowledge of the Rapid Response Initiative, the Corps and the needs of Ireland's UN stand-by partners, supplemented by three individuals with Rapid Response experience with a deep knowledge of the requirements. Panel members were required to identify from the list of applicants where a possible conflict might apply: where possible conflicts of interest were identified, the panel member concerned neither assessed the relevant application nor interviewed the person concerned. Unconscious bias training was also provided to panel members.

The three members of the Rapid Response Corps who participated in the process were remunerated in line with the daily rate paid to members on deployment. Two of the three also participated in the shortlisting in addition to the interviews. Hotel accommodation was provided during the shortlisting and interview process. Travel expenses, according to Civil Service rates, were paid.

197 applications were received by the deadline of 16 May, 2018. 65 applicants were female and 132 were male. Late applications were not considered. 24 female and 61 male applicants were shortlisted for interview, of which 22 female and 47 male applicants successfully passed the interview stage.

One applicant, who was not shortlisted for interview, appealed the decision of the Shortlisting Panel. In line with the appeals process, the application was re-assessed independently by a shortlisting panel not involved in the original decision. The appeal was not successful. There are no further stages of appeal. The Code of Conduct of the Commission of Public Service Appointments is not applicable to the Rapid Response Corps recruitment process, as it relates to permanent appointments to the civil service.

Applicants were required to be fluent in English. Additionally, French and Arabic were considered as desirable requirements, as requested by our stand-by partners in the UN – the goal of the Roster is ultimately to meet the demand driven needs of these partners.

Ireland's Rapid Response Corps roster and the Election Observation roster have different objectives and requirements. This is reflected in the criteria and in the recruitment processes for both, with the nature, duration and location of Rapid Response Corps deployments a deciding factor in determining the need for interview in the case of this roster.

Departmental Funding

54. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if funding is available for cultural groups to travel abroad to tour and perform; if funding is available as part of the St. Patrick's Day celebrations abroad; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36159/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): In an increasingly competitive world for investment and tourism, our culture is a unique selling point for Ireland. It helps to raise our visibility internationally, promotes a positive image for the country and represents a powerful means to forge connections with other countries. It is a key driver for our tourist industry. Culture is also an important economic sector in its own right, generating jobs and stimulating economic activity across the country.

The Government is committed to investing in and promoting our culture nationally and overseas. Primary responsibility for the promotion of Irish arts and culture overseas lies with my colleague, the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and is operated through Culture Ireland.

My Department and the Mission network work closely with Culture Ireland to maximise the impact of our investment in cultural promotion overseas. Department officials participate in meetings of the Expert Advisory Committee, the group charged with evaluating and making recommendations on applications for Culture Ireland funding.

Culture forms a key part of my Department's promotion of Ireland internationally. We do this through a range of activities undertaken at HQ and through the network of Embassies and Consulates. Under the Promoting Ireland programme, each mission is provided with a budget which is used to fund activities in pursuit of the five high level goals set out in "The Global Island – Ireland's Foreign Policy for a Changing World": Our People, Our Values, Our Prosperity, Our Place in Europe and Our Influence. Cultural performances play an important part in this regard. In 2017, 24% of missions' spending under the programme was classified as support for cultural promotion.

This funding covers a number of activities including support for side events linked to performances by individuals and groups travelling independently from Ireland or those in receipt of Culture Ireland funding. Funding is also provided for cultural performances by Irish citizens and the wider diaspora living overseas. Missions may also directly arrange for cultural groups to travel from Ireland to perform in their countries of accreditation, usually around the St Patrick's Day period. In such cases, funding is generally confined to travel and subsistence costs and with effect from 2018 on a pilot basis, a modest performance fee may occasionally be paid.

My Department's Trade Division also has a limited budget to support the promotion of Irish culture internationally. This includes the provision of €150,000 annually to the Centre Culturel Irlandais, which promotes Irish culture and performers in Paris. The Division also provides resources to missions, principally in the form of exhibitions which showcase Irish literature and culture.

Human Rights

55. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the practical toolkit on business and human rights for public and private entities that was promised in the national plan on business and human rights has been developed; if not, when it will be completed; and if so, if it has already been circulated to relevant public and private entities. [36351/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The development of a practical toolkit on business and human rights for public and private entities is one of the initial priorities for the Business and Human Rights Implementation Group, to be established under the National Plan on Business and Human Rights.

As provided for under the Plan, work is currently underway on a comprehensive baseline assessment of the legislative and regulatory framework pertaining to business and human rights as it applies in Ireland. This work is expected to be completed by October and will guide the work of the Implementation Group in delivering on the Plan's key commitments, including the toolkit.

Human Rights

56. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he, or his officials, have contacted the ESB to encourage and support awareness of effective human rights due diligence; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a commitment to encourage and support awareness of effective human rights due diligence by State owned or controlled companies formed part of The State Duty to Protect Human Rights section of the National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights; and the support that has been extended to the ESB in this regard. [36352/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The goal of the National Plan on Business and Human Rights 2017 -2020, published in November 2017, is to promote responsible business practices at home and overseas by all Irish business enterprises. A key commitment of the Plan is the establishment of a Business and Human Rights Implementation Group, to comprise representatives from Government, the business community and civil society, which will have responsibility for delivering and reporting on a number of actions. In this regard, a number of initial priorities have been identified in the Plan, including a commitment to encourage and support awareness of effective human rights due diligence by State owned or controlled companies. Work is currently underway in my Department on the appointment of the Implementation Group and I expect it to take up this task once it is in place.

Human Rights

57. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the report of the UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar of 27 August 2018; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that the report found that Myanmar's armed forces had taken actions that amounted to the gravest crimes under international law including genocide; and his views on the report's findings and recommendation that Myanmar's senior military officials must be prosecuted for genocide and war crimes against the Rohingya and other ethnic minorities. [36353/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission (IIFFM) on Myanmar makes for harrowing reading. Ireland has strongly supported the mandate of the IIFFM since it was established in March 2017 and I offer my thanks to them for their work and for this report. The findings of the IIFFM corroborate many of the eyewitness accounts which have emerged from Myanmar in recent times. In particular the report provides credible findings that human rights violations amounting to crimes against humanity and war crimes have been committed by members of the Burmese Military (Tatmadaw) and other security forces in Rakhine, Kachin and Shan States. These crimes include the widespread killing of civilians; rape and sexual violence; torture and enforced disappearances.

The IIFFM's report also finds that there is sufficient evidence of crimes committed in Rakhine State being so grave that they warrant a competent court to determine the liability for the crime of genocide of those in the Tatmadaw chain of command.

I fully support the findings of the IIFFM. The work of the IIFFM in investigating allegations, recording victim testimony and gathering other evidence, so that it can be preserved for further criminal proceedings, is crucial to ensuring full accountability.

The report of the IIFFM notes that the crimes in Myanmar "stem from deep fractures in society and structural problems that have been apparent and unaddressed for decades."

It is therefore imperative that Myanmar and the international community respond comprehensively to the findings of the report and its recommendations in a way that addresses the long-standing root causes of this crisis and in a manner that ensures the perpetrators of the crimes described in the report are swiftly brought to justice.

I have taken note of the recommendations and Ireland is actively engaging with our international partners in preparing responses, including at the upcoming 39th Session of the Human Rights Council where this report will be formally presented.

Human Rights

58. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the fact that to date in 2018, 18 environmental activists have been killed in Guatemala and it is now one of the most dangerous countries in the world for environmental activists (details supplied); if the killing of these activists will be condemned; and if the issue will be raised with his Guatemalan counterpart. [36354/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am aware of the difficult situation that currently exists for environmental activists and other civil society actors in Guatemala, and across Latin America, and my Department is monitoring developments closely.

I unreservedly condemn the violence being perpetrated against these groups, and would like to extend my sympathies to all those affected. The rights of freedom of expression and to peaceful demonstration are essential to a functioning democracy and must be protected.

Although great advances have been made in Guatemala since the signing of peace accords in 1996 that marked the end of three decades of civil war, I am aware that there are concerns about a culture of historic impunity that remains. I urge the Government of Guatemala to fully investigate the incidents to which the Deputy refers and to bring the perpetrators to justice.

Ireland engaged in the Review of Guatemala during the 28th Session of Universal Periodic Review of the Human Rights Council in Geneva in November 2017. We took this opportunity to voice concerns over attacks and intimidation against human rights defenders in Guatemala, and called on the Government of Guatemala to take all necessary measures to protect human rights defenders.

We also took the opportunity of the Universal Periodic Review to urge the Government of Guatemala to continue with its efforts to address inequality suffered by indigenous peoples, a group which I understand is heavily affected by the violence outlined by the Deputy. I reiterate these calls today and urge their Government to protect all civil society actors and their ability to carry out their important work across the country. While we do not have a resident embassy in Guatemala, my officials in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Dublin meet regularly with civil society organisations and human rights defenders active in Guatemala and the wider region, and raise concerns at EU and international level.

Departmental Communications

59. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the position in his Department and the organisations under its aegis that have arrangements in place for lo-call numbers or 1800, 1850 and 1890 phone numbers for members of the public to contact his Department or organisations under its aegis; the number of these that are completely free to call to persons who use mobile phones and may incur major bills phoning such organisations; if the situation will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36400/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade does not operate lo-call numbers.

Human Rights Cases

60. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the case of a person (details supplied) in Saudi Arabia; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that they have been charged for organising peaceful protests and are being tried in a military tribunal and face the death penalty; if the Saudi Arabian regime's arrest and detention of this person and the other human rights activists arrested with them will be condemned; if he will request their release and the end of the death penalty in Saudi Arabia; and if he will raise the case with his Saudi Arabian counterpart. [36407/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am aware of the case raised by the Deputy. I am concerned by reports that the death penalty is being considered by the prosecutor in this case, as well as the reports of the conduct of the pretrial proceedings. Ireland is unequivocal in its stance on the death penalty and we oppose its use in all circumstances. The abolition of the death penalty is one of Ireland's international priorities, and my Department regularly conveys our stance on this issue to all countries where the death penalty is still in use. The continued imposition and scale of death sentences in Saudi Arabia continues to be a cause for grave concern.

Ireland has consistently availed of appropriate opportunities to raise issues of human rights in Saudi Arabia, bilaterally with interlocutors from Saudi Arabia, as well as at EU and international level. During the last Irish Foreign Minister level visit to Saudi Arabia, a Trade Mission to the Kingdom in late 2016, my predecessor, Minister Flanagan, had a discussion around human rights, including the use of the death penalty, with his counterpart.

Officials from my Department regularly raise human rights cases with the Saudi Embassy here in Dublin. Our Embassy in Riyadh raises a range of human rights issues directly with the Saudi authorities.

The EU in Riyadh also takes the opportunity to raise concerns with the Saudi authorities. In August, the EU had a frank and constructive first dialogue on Human Rights with the Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia. The EU is now seeking to follow up on this by establishing a permanent bilateral dialogue forum on Human Rights between the EU and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It is hoped such a dialogue will allow for further candid discussions on human rights issues in Saudi Arabia, and the possibility of cooperation in the field of human rights protection and promotion.

Officials from my Department have raised our concerns about the use of the death penalty generally, and Saudi Arabia's use in particular, in relevant human rights fora. At the Human Rights Council in Geneva in March 2018, Ireland made a specific reference to Saudi Arabia in our national Item 4 statement, highlighting our grave concerns over "the continued use of the death penalty in Saudi Arabia".

My officials and I will continue to raise our concerns about human rights issues, and specifically the continued use of the death penalty, directly with the Saudi authorities, and at EU and international levels, whenever opportunities arise.

Question No. 61 answered with Question No. 47.

Human Rights

62. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the efforts being made at national, EU and international level regarding the concerns of the detention of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36487/18]

63. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views regarding human rights in Bahrain; the steps that have been taken to address same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36488/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 62 and 63 together.

I am aware of the case referred to by Deputy Collins, and of the reports that the individual in question has been denied adequate healthcare in prison. Ireland attaches great importance to safeguarding the human rights of all prisoners with due regard for the international standards enshrined in the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners.

I remain very concerned about the deteriorating human rights situation in Bahrain. Statements from the Bahraini Government on its commitment to safeguarding human rights enshrined in the Bahraini Constitution are undermined by ongoing instances of violations of fundamental freedoms, including violations of freedom of opinion and expression. A number of worrying developments suggest an increasingly restrictive approach, targeting those who express disagreement with or criticism of the Government. The shrinking of civil and political space is especially concerning in light of parliamentary elections which are due to take place in November this year.

Ireland's concerns about human rights issues in Bahrain are regularly conveyed to the Bahraini authorities, including through the Bahraini Embassy in London and through Ireland's

(non-resident) Ambassador to Bahrain. In February of this year, officials from my Department met with the Ambassador of Bahrain in Dublin, and raised Ireland's concerns about the human rights situation in Bahrain, including the case referred to by the Deputy.

Ireland also regularly raises the case of human rights in Bahrain at the Human Rights Council (HRC) in Geneva, in the form of national statements and its support to EU Statements. In Ireland's Item 4 Statement (human rights situations that require the Council's attention) at the HRC session in June 2018, we called on Bahrain to "maintain its commitments to respect freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of peaceful assembly and the right to fair trial." Ireland also supported the references made to Bahrain in the EU Item 2 Statement (on the reports of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights) which highlighted the deterioration of the human rights situation, with particular reference to the shrinking of political space in Bahrain.

My Department will continue to monitor the situation in Bahrain, and will continue to call on the Bahraini Government to make good on their stated commitment to make progress in the area of human rights.

Official Engagements

64. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on his recent visit to Germany; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36489/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I visited Germany on 28 August at the invitation of the German Minister for Foreign Affairs, Heiko Maas, who invited me to speak at the "Economic Day" at Germany's annual Ambassadors' conference. The event was attended by over 200 German Heads of Mission and some 700 German business people from all sectors of the economy. Later, I had a constructive bilateral meeting with Minister Maas where we discussed Brexit at some length. Germany has been a consistent supporter of Ireland in the Brexit negotiations, something we greatly appreciate, and this was reaffirmed by the Minister both in our meeting and in the subsequent press conference. We also had very useful exchanges on the EU's Multi-Annual Financial Framework, migration and the implementation of the recently-published review of Irish German relations, including the opening next year of a Consulate in Frankfurt.

I then met with the CEO of Siemens, Joe Kaeser, and this was followed by a background briefing, hosted by Reuters, for a number of political correspondents in the German press and broadcast media. I also did an interview with Reuters TV.

Germany is an indispensable partner for Ireland, both in the European Union and bilaterally. It is our fourth largest trading partner; our third largest tourism market and our second largest inward investor. The Government places the highest priority on maintaining and developing our relationship.

Brexit Negotiations

65. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of Brexit negotiations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36490/18]

83. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade

the status of the Brexit negotiations; the progress on reaching agreement on the backstop; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36905/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 65 and 83 together.

We are in a critical phase of the Article 50 negotiations, which resumed on 16 August and have been continuous since then. Both sets of negotiators have committed to bringing new energy to the talks, including on the Irish specific issues, and I welcome these commitments. It is important to recall that there are in effect two separate, though linked, negotiations: one to agree a full legal Withdrawal Agreement, and the other to reach a political understanding on the framework for future relations. It is the former which is the immediate priority.

In his statement on 31 August following his meeting with the UK Secretary of State, Dominic Raab, the EU's Chief Negotiator Michel Barnier noted some progress on a number of remaining issues in the recent negotiations, including on the handling of data in the context of the withdrawal, though more progress is needed on the issue of geographical indications. Discussions to agree a political declaration on the framework for the future EU-UK relationship have also begun in earnest since the resumption of negotiations last month. This has been enabled by the UK's White Paper on the future relationship and is being taken forward on the basis of the European Council Guidelines agreed in March. In this context, there has been a convergence of views on the ambition of future EU-UK cooperation on foreign policy, security and defence. However, it is also clear that there remain very substantial differences on many issues.

Regarding the backstop, Michel Barnier again stressed on 31 August that a legally operable solution for the Irish backstop is essential for agreeing the Withdrawal Agreement and called on the UK to provide the necessary data for the purpose of examining technical issues on the nature, location and modality of the controls needed in the event of the backstop being implemented.

Our position and that of the EU remains that while we would like to see the border issue resolved through the future relationship, there must be a backstop in the Withdrawal Agreement that provides absolute certainty that no matter what the outcome to the negotiations on the future relationship, there will be no hard border on the island of Ireland.

We have a firm commitment from Prime Minister May – if no other solution is agreed – to full alignment with the relevant rules of the Single Market and Customs Union to deliver on her guarantee of avoiding a hard border. In March, she also agreed to having a legally operative 'backstop' in the Withdrawal Agreement.

The EU and Ireland will hold the UK to these commitments. As the European Council made very clear at its meeting in June, nothing is agreed until everything is agreed and there can be no Withdrawal Agreement, and therefore no transition, without an agreement on the backstop. Ministers reiterated this in Brussels on 20 July and agreed that renewed efforts are needed to conclude, as soon as possible, all outstanding issues in the Withdrawal Agreement, including the backstop. The EU27 also reaffirmed their solidarity and support for Ireland.

Passport Applications Administration

66. Deputy John Curran asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the progress being made to enable passport renewals for children to be processed online; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36536/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): An online platform for the renewal of adult passports was launched in March 2017 and, to date, over 250,000 applications have been received. The online service has demonstrated efficiencies for both the citizen and the Passport Service with an average processing time of less than 10 working days. Work is ongoing to significantly expand this service to children renewing their Passport as well as applicants who require a name change, an observation on their new passport and those wishing to replace a damaged Passport. We are also developing a system whereby people will be able to provide the documents to support these applications from anywhere in the world. The expansion of our new online services will be launched by the end of 2018.

An extensive engagement campaign will coincide with this launch to promote its use as the fastest and most convenient way to renew a passport. I would urge applicants wishing to renew their passports, whether residing in Ireland or overseas, to avail of the online passport application service where possible.

Passport Applications Data

67. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of passport applications processed by the Passport Service to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36537/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): From January 1st to August 31st this year the Passport Service issued just under 620,000 passports.

Consular Services Remit

68. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the protocol in place for assisting families with legal costs that have lost loved ones as a result of a criminal act abroad; if he will review the policy in this regard to ensure that financial assistance is provided to allow the families' interest be represented in subsequent legal proceedings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36654/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department is not in a position to provide financial assistance for Irish citizens involved in legal proceedings overseas and has no budget provision for assistance in this area. My Department provides consular assistance to the families of victims in such cases. It cannot provide legal advice or become a party to legal processes in another jurisdiction. Were the Department to provide financial assistance for legal costs it might be expected that the Department input into other aspects of a legal case such as selection of a legal representative, advice on legal processes, decisions and costs etc.

If the Deputy wishes to provide details of any specific case where hardship is being experienced by a family in the circumstances described, officials in my Department's Consular Directorate would be available to offer consular assistance to the family.

The Deputy is welcome to write to my office with any relevant details.

International Election Monitoring

69. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade

the number of applications by gender that were received by the closing deadline to join the 2018 election observation roster; the number of late applications that were received; if they have been admitted to the selection process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36786/18]

70. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the date and reason it was decided not to proceed with the original plan to have merit-based interviews to select applicants for the 2018 election observation roster; the name, expertise and qualifications of the three assessors appointed to select the election observers; the methods that will be used to select the most meritorious applicants; if this will involve language testing in cases in which an applicant claims to have a high level of foreign language proficiency; if there are measures in place to ensure members of the 2013 roster are not unfairly favoured over newer applicants; when the assessment will be conducted; when applicants will be informed of the outcome of their applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36787/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): I propose to take Questions Nos. 69 and 70 together.

I refer the Deputy to the responses to previous parliamentary questions on these matters, Questions 103 and 104 of 24 July 2018, Questions 57 and 58 of 03 July 2018, Question 107 of 24 April 2018, Question 16 of 25 January 2018.

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 or the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The call for applications to establish a new Election Observation roster was issued on 2 July last and the call was open until 20 August 2018. Late applications were not accepted. The call was published on two Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade websites: www.dfa.ie and www.irishaid.ie. It was also publicised on social media.

As the closing date for submission of applications has only recently passed and as applications are still being verified and screened, it would not be appropriate for the Department to provide details on the applications until the selection process is completed and the roster established.

The candidate information booklet which was provided to all applicants and also published on the Departments website set out all of the necessary details about the operation of the roster, the eligibility requirements, criteria and the process and methodology leading to the establishment of the roster.

In the interests of an efficient process, and taking into account manifold other demands on staff, including the continuing prudential management of Irish Aid funding, it was decided that the assessment of applications to join the new Election Observation Roster should be a paper-based exercise. While interviews had been considered, they are now not planned. This rationale was set in the letter of 9 July 2018 from the Secretary General of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, available on the Oireachtas website.

A number of selection panels will be established to appraise all of the applications that meet the essential criteria. The selection panels will consist of two officers from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and one external person who will have appropriate experience. Panel members will receive application assessment and unconscious bias training. All panel members will be obliged to disclose any potential conflict of interest. If such an interest is notified, ap-

appropriate safeguards will be implemented. A calibration exercise will be conducted to ensure consistency. All applicants will be appraised on the basis of the information contained and set out on the official application form. Verification of data contained in the application, including language proficiency, will also form part of the process.

All applicants seeking to join the election roster will be appraised against the criteria set out in the Volunteer Information Booklet. Further, all applicants will be treated in exactly the same way regardless of whether they have been on a previous roster. The current roster will be extinguished once the new roster is formally established. The key objective is to generate a sufficient cadre of available, qualified volunteers which can meet the needs of election observation missions, as the EU and OSCE require, and which evolve over time.

It is expected that the process to establish the new roster will be finalised by the end of 2018.

International Election Monitoring

71. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the background to the policy change to now provide Irish election observers to OSCE missions to the United States of America; the number of applications received for this mission by gender; the criteria and method by which applicants were selected for this mission; the name of the selected applicants; the avenues of appeal open to unsuccessful applicants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36788/18]

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 or the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). I refer the Deputy to the responses to previous Parliamentary Questions on this matter, Question 138 of 10 July 2018, Question 167 of 4 July 2018, Questions 167 and 172 of 25 October 2017, Questions 357 and 358 of 13 December 2016, Question 243 of 2 November 2016 and Questions 335, 336 and 337 of 14 June 2016.

The OSCE issued a request for long-term observers to participate in the Limited Election Observation Mission (LEOM) for the Mid-term Congressional elections in the United States of America, scheduled to take place on 06 November 2018. The OSCE indicated verbally to the Election Desk that they were reissuing this call requesting the assistance of participating States in seconding long-term observers for this LEOM.

The standard practice of the Department has been to focus on elections in developing countries and emerging democracies and not to deploy observers for elections in EU Member States, the United States and Canada. However, in the case at issue, the OSCE made a specific request to Ireland to nominate a long-term observer, having difficulty finding a full complement. Following careful consideration of this request, and in line with Ireland's longstanding support for the OSCE, one long-term observer from the Irish panel of election observers was nominated to participate in the OSCE Limited Election Observation Mission (LEOM) for the Mid-term Congressional elections in the United States of America, scheduled to take place on 6 November 2018.

The criteria for selection for this LEOM is exactly the same as applied in all observation missions which was set out in the Information Note for Applicants accompanying the call for

applications to join the Election Observation Roster established in 2013.

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 Department received 13 applications to participate in this LEOM from existing Roster Members by the deadline, 9 of whom were male members of the Roster and 4 were female members of the Roster. The Department did not receive any request for an appeal from unsuccessful applicants. As the LEOM has not yet taken place, and no individual therefore yet been deployed, it would not be appropriate at this stage to release the name of potential observers.

Election Monitoring Missions

72. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the name of all members appointed to the 2013 election observation roster; the date that each was appointed or reappointed in the case of members that were on the pre-2013 roster; the date that members resigned or were removed; the number of missions completed by each member since 2013; the reason some members have been on numerous missions while others have never been on a single mission; his plans to ensure an even distribution of observation opportunities on the 2018 roster; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36789/18]

73. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of election observers that have withdrawn from missions prior to departure in each of the past five years; the cost involved in each year including unused airline tickets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36790/18]

74. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of election observers that have returned prematurely from missions in each of the past five years; if they had to refund expenses paid; if not, if they were written off; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36791/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): I propose to take Questions Nos. 72 to 74, inclusive, together.

I refer the Deputy to the responses to previous parliamentary questions on these matters, including Question 109 of 24 July 2018, Questions 167, 166 and 172 of 25 October 2017 and Question 397 of 26 July 2017.

For each election observation mission, the EU or OSCE set out their specific requirements and as per normal practice all roster members are invited to apply to participate in any mission which Ireland proposes to deploy observers with a view to ensuring the widest possible participation in missions by roster members.

In many cases, the EU and OSCE also invite Member States to nominate new observers or observers with limited experience. In selecting nominees to be put forward, the specific criteria set by the EU or OSCE, including relevant local and regional experience, language proficiency, gender and length of time since serving on a mission, provide the main basis for decision-making. In cases where observers participated in a higher number of missions, this can be due

to specific language requirements, the overall number of applications received, or other specific requirements which the EU or OSCE may identify from time to time depending on the specific circumstances of the election observation mission.

As previously communicated, a system to record data on withdrawals was put in place in 2015. Since then, 21 individuals have withdrawn from 22 missions, including one roster member who withdrew on two occasions, at a total cost to the Department of €1,268.82. In all but one case funds advanced by the Department were fully repaid.

In one case repayment was not sought, as the pre-departure grant of €600 had been paid to a nominated observer who had already advanced their preparations for an upcoming EU observation mission. At a late stage, this observer was appointed by the EU to a different function. Given the extreme lateness of the change – within a day or two of their anticipated departure on mission – pre-departure expenditure (such as vaccinations) had already been incurred. Under the circumstances the Department did not seek the repayment of the grant. In any case, the observer was selected by the EU for a separate mission within twelve months, and on that occasion was not paid the pre-departure grant.

Officials in my Department advise that early return from Election Observation Mission occur rarely, as Observers have committed to being available for the duration of the deployment. From the records available, only one Observer has returned early and this was due to the OSCE Election Observation Mission being cancelled and thus out of the control of the individual concerned. The Observer refunded the outstanding expenses paid in advance of their departure.

Taking account of members who have left the roster, and those who have been added from the reserve panel, the current roster complement stands at 191 and the reserve panel has been fully utilised. The Department does not hold records regarding previous roster memberships. For privacy reasons, the Department does not disclose the date that members resigned or were removed from the roster, as these may relate to illness or bereavement among other reasons.

Names of the Election Observation Roster appointed in 2013:

Dermot Ahern

Suhail Ahmad

Les Allamby

Chris Andrews

Frances Ball

Peter Ballagh

Tania Banotti

Patricia Barker

Richard Barrett

Leila Blacking

Donal Blake

Mary Boland

Michael Boyle

Adrienne Boyle

Noel Brennan

Caroline Brennan

Damien Brennan

Fionnuala Brennan

Paul Brennan

Andrea Breslin

Gabrielle Brocklesby

Catherine Brophy

Gerard Buckley

William Bulman

Colm Burke

John Burke

Eric Byrne

Elaine Byrne

Barry Cannon

Philippe Carr

Pat Carroll

Anne Choiseul

Michael Cleary

John Paul Coakley

Dermot Cogan

Pauline Conway

Sandra Conway

Ciara Conway

Peter Cotter

John Cousins

Michael Coyne

Evanna Craig

Kevin Cronin

Marie Cross

Mary Cummins

Diarmuid Cunniffe

John Curran

Asa (Karl) Cusack

Kieran Dalton

Bernard Daly

Eamonn Daly

Thomas Daly

David Denny

Anne Donnellan

Patricia Donnelly

Peter Donovan

James Doody

Mary Dowling

Terence Duffy

Mary Dunne

Patrick Durcan

John Durnin

Thomas Faolán Earlie

Peter Emerson

Brian Fagan

Colm Fahy

Gerard Finnegan

Annetta Flanigan

Terence Fleming

Marja Foley

Michael Gannon

Frederick Gilligan

Fergus Gleeson

Brendan Gogarty

Michael Good

Niall Gormley

Patrick Grant

Deirdre Grogan

Kevin Grogan

Munyikwa Hamadziripi

Dominic Hannigan

Nuala Haughey

Anne Harris Hennon

Frank Heslin

Sarah-Jane Hillery

Edward Horgan

Maca Hourihane

Michael Humphreys

Richard Humphreys

Jas Kaminski

Michael Kavanagh

Patricia Kearns

Cecilia Keaveney

Cathal Kelly

Patricia Kelly

Thomas John Kelly

Frank Kennefick

Helen Keogh

Maria Kiernan

Emily King

Ciaran Kinsella

Tom Kitt

Dorcha Lee

Jimmy Lenehan

Mark Long

John Lynch

Grattan Lynch

John Lyons

Ruadhán MacAodháin

Eithne MacDermott

Fidelma MacHale

Jean Celeste Mackenzie

Brian MacMahon

Desmond MacMahon

Patrick Maher

Elaine Mahon

Joseph Mangan

Anne Marlborough

Seamus Martin

Raymond Maxwell

Bernard McCabe

Ellen McCabe

James McCarthy

Michael McCarthy

Vincent McCorley

Fergal McCusker

Robert McDaid

Ronan McDermott

Donal McDonald

Finola McDowell

Padraic McDunphy

Richard McEvoy

Amy Rose McGovern

Jean McGrath

Una McGurk

Peter McMahan

Gerard McNamara

Michael McNamara

Peter Miles

John Minihan

Olivia Mitchell

Andrew Montague

John Martin Moore

Alison Moore

Rebecca Moynihan

Siobhan Mullally

Elizabeth Mullan

John Mulvihill

Karen Murphy

Nicholas Murphy

Ray Murphy

Edward Naessens

William Nolan

Robert Norris

Fiachra O' Luain

Seosamh O Murchu

Jerry O'Brien

Ronán O'Brien

Sean O'Callaghan

Eimear O'Casey

Charlie O'Connor

Shane O'Connor

Annette O'Gorman

Almha O'Keeffe

Anne Ormonde

Aidan O'Shea

Barbara O'Shea

Mary O'Shea

Paul O'Shea

Finbar O'Sullivan

Nora Owen

Diarmuid Peavoy

John Paul Phelan

Ann Phelan

Geraldine Power

John Purcell

Pat Quinlan

Theresa Reidy

Andrew Richardson

Marion Roche

Bill Rolston

Paul Rowe

Mary Russell

Audrey Ryan

Robert Sampson

Joseph Scanlon

Gisela Claire Schmidt-Martin

Frank Scott

Colin Smith

Jimmy Somers

Victoria Somers

Traolach Sweeney

Paul Tighe

Michael Verling

Brendan Walsh

Eamonn Thomas Walsh

Jacinta Walsh

Sheena Walsh McMahon

Emma Warwick

Steve Wrenn

Members of the Election Observation Roster appointed (from the reserve panel) after May 2013 to fill vacancies that arose:

Paddy Donnelly

Camilla Fanning

Denis Kirby

Niall O’Cinnseala

Larry O’Loughlin

Joy Orpen Kanter

Geraldine O’Neill

The number of missions undertaken by Observers since the formation of the Election Observation roster in 2013: Names marked with an asterix are officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade who work on relevant geographic desks or as election Focal Points, and on occasion also participate in such missions.

Name	
Adrienne Boyle	2
Aidan O’Shea	3
Aisling Schorderet*	1
Almha O’Keeffe	4
Andrea Breslin	1
Andrew Richardson	4
Ann Ormonde	2
Anne Choiseul	2
Anne Donnellan	3
Annetta Flanigan	3
Asa Karl Cusack	3
Audrey Ryan	3
Barbara O’Shea	5
Bernard (Brian) Daly	3
Brendan Gogarty	3
Brian Fagan	2
Brian McMahan	1
Caroline Brennan	3
Cathal Kelly	2
Catherine Brophy	2
Cecilia Keaveney	7
Christopher Andrews	1
Ciara Gilvarry*	1
Ciaran Kinsella	2
Claire Coughlan*	1
Colin Smith	1

Colm Fahy	2
David Denny	1
Deirdre Bourke*	1
Deirdre Grogan	2
Denis Kirby	2
Dermot Ahern	1
Diarmuid Cunniffe	2
Diarmuid Peavoy	3
Dominic Hannigan	1
Donal (Daniel) Blake	2
Donal Mac Donald	1
Dorcha Lee	3
Eamonn Walsh	1
Edward Horgan	2
Edward Naessens	2
Eimear O'Casey	3
Eithne MacDermott	3
Elaine Byrne	1
Elizabeth Mullan	2
Ellen McCabe	1
Eric Byrne	3
Fergal McCusker	2
Fergus Gleeson	3
Fiachra O Luain	1
Fidelma McHale	2
Finbar O'Sullivan	3
Fionnuala Brennan	1
Frances Ball	2
Frank Kennefick	3
Frank Scott	1
Gabrielle Brocklesby	2
Geraldine O'Neill	2
Geraldine Power	3
Gerard Buckley	2
Grattan Lynch	1
Helen Keogh	1
Jack (John) Purcell	1
James Doody	3
James McCarthy	2
James Somers	2
Jean Celeste MacKenzie	3
Jean Marie McGrath	1
Jerry O'Brien	1
John Burke	4
John Crowe*	1

Questions - Written Answers

John O'Sullivan*	1
John Cousins	1
John Durnin	2
John Lynch	3
John Moore	2
John Mulvihill	4
John Paul Coakley	2
John Paul Phelan	1
Joseph Mangan	2
Joseph Scanlon	3
Kevin Cronin	3
Kevin Grogan	4
Kieran Dalton	2
Lelia Blacking	2
Marga Foley	3
Maria Kiernan	3
Marie Cross	2
Marion Roche	4
Mark Long	1
Mary Boland	3
Mary Jo Dowling	3
Mary O'Shea	1
Michael Boyle	4
Michael Coyne	2
Michael Gannon	1
Michael Good	1
Michael Kavanagh	2
Michael Verling	3
Niall Gormley	1
Niall O'Cinnseala	1
Nicholas Murphy	1
Noel Brennan	2
Olivia Mitchell	1
Paddy Donnelly	2
Padraic McDunphy	2
Pat Carroll	1
Patricia Barker	1
Patricia Donnelly	1
Patrick Maher	3
Patrick McDaniel*	1
Patrick O'Reilly *	1
Patrick Quinlan	2
Paul Brennan	3
Paul O'Shea	2
Paul Rowe	1

Paul Tighe	2
Pauline Conway	1
Peter Ballagh	1
Peter Cotter	2
Peter Donovan	3
Peter Emerson	2
Philippe Carr	2
Peter McMahon	4
Raymond Maxwell	1
Raymond Murphy	1
Rebecca Moynihan	1
Robert McDaid	1
Robert Sampson	2
Ronan O'Brien	1
Ruadhan Mac Aodhain	1
Seamus Martin	4
Sean O'Callaghan	2
Sheena Walsh McMahon	2
Steve Wrenn	1
Suhail Ahmad	3
Terence Duffy	4
Terence Fleming	2
Theresa Reidy	2
Thomas Earlie	2
Thomas John Kelly	2
Tom Kitt	1
Traolach Sweeney	2
Una McGurk	1
Victoria Somers	1
Vincent McCorley	3
William Bulman	1
William Nolan	1

Election Monitoring Missions

75. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if there has been contact with the Revenue Commissioners regarding the operation of the 2013 election observation roster; if this resulted in changes, undertakings or settlements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36792/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): I refer the Deputy to the responses to previous parliamentary questions on this matter, Question 395 of 26 July 2017, Question 318 of 09 May 2017, Question 653 of 02 May 2017.

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 referen-

dums. Irish observers participate primarily in missions organised by the European Union or the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

Members of the Election Roster who are nominated as long or short term observers by the Department do not receive remuneration. They are paid a daily allowance, as determined by the EU and the OSCE, to cover the cost of food, accommodation and other out-of-pocket expenses, along with a pre-departure grant of €600. Officials of the Department were in contact with the Revenue Commissioners in relation to any possible need for Tax Clearance Certificates. Volunteers on the roster are required to provide a tax clearance certificate in respect of any payments in excess of €10,000 per annum and as set out in the Volunteer Information booklet this will continue to be a requirement for members of the new roster which will be established in early 2019.

Humanitarian Aid Provision

76. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the decision by the United States of America to cease funding to the United Nations Relations Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East; the actions he will take in view of this decision; if he has made his views regarding this decision known to the US administration; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36852/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I deeply regret the US decision to cease funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and I made my views clear in my public statement on 1 September. I believe that this move is dangerous and will only have a negative effect on the Middle East region, and I have explicitly expressed my concern in contacts with the US administration.

I have witnessed first-hand the vital services that UNRWA provides to the Palestinian people, not just in Gaza and the West Bank, but across the region. Entire generations of refugees have benefitted from UNRWA's provision of essential food, education, health care, relief and social services.

I have visited the region three times since assuming my position as Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, including a visit to Gaza in January where I met with UNRWA's Commissioner General, Pierre Krähenbühl, and reconfirmed Ireland's commitment to UNRWA. In Gaza, I saw for myself the challenges on the ground for UNRWA and the valuable work carried out by the Agency in delivering core services, especially in education and health, to some 5.3 million Palestine refugees, including over a million Gazans who depend on its assistance. The services that UNRWA provides are very necessary, and will remain necessary until a just and lasting solution is found.

Ireland has been a longstanding supporter of the critical work undertaken by UNRWA. In January, in recognition of the challenges facing UNRWA in implementing its programmes this year, Ireland brought forward its 2018 contribution to the Programme Budget. In June, I authorised a further contribution of €250,000 for UNRWA in response to the urgent appeal of the UN Secretary General, bringing Ireland's total funding to UNRWA to €6 million this year, up from €5.5 million last year.

UNRWA's work is being carried out in an ever more complex and demanding environment. The conflict in Syria has put additional strain on UNRWA's operations in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan, and the deterioration in the humanitarian situation in Gaza and the ongoing occupa-

tion of the West Bank is resulting in continued hardship for refugees. As a consequence, the demand for UNRWA's services has grown rapidly. The decision by the US to cease funding to UNRWA will undoubtedly exacerbate the Agency's funding shortfall and threaten essential services. Ireland, together with our EU partners, will continue its assistance to the Palestinian people, including its support to UNRWA's services, while we will also continue our efforts to reach a two-state solution to the conflict.

Human Rights Cases

77. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the jailing of two journalists in Myanmar; the actions being taken at EU and international level to assist and protect the Rohingya; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36853/18]

81. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the jailing of persons (details supplied) in Myanmar for reporting on the killing of civilians in Inn Din; the steps he will take to raise this issue with the government of Myanmar; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36859/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 77 and 81 together.

The sentencing this week of Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo, two Reuters journalists working in Myanmar, to seven years in prison under the Official Secrets Act, is a cause of significant concern. That they were arrested for covering allegations of grave human rights violations by the Myanmar Military against the Rohingya community in Rakhine State makes this case all the more worrying.

Media freedom and critical journalism are essential pillars of democracy. A free press has a key function in promoting transparency and holding democratic governments to account. I therefore call for the immediate and unconditional release of the two journalists and call on the Myanmar authorities to ensure adequate conditions for journalists to carry out their work.

Ireland continues to actively engage with our international partners on these and other issues of grave concern through bilateral contacts in Myanmar and via participation in the EU and UN responses including at the upcoming 39th Session of the Human Rights Council.

More broadly, Ireland and the international community have taken a number of steps to address the Rohingya crisis which have focused on responding to the humanitarian crisis, promoting a political solution and pressing for accountability for crimes and other violations of human rights abuses that have occurred.

While efforts aimed at achieving accountability and a political solution to the crisis are vitally important, there is an immediate need for a life-saving humanitarian response to the extremely difficult conditions faced by the huge numbers of displaced members of the Rohingya community now mainly in Bangladesh. To this end, Ireland has actively supported the international humanitarian response to the refugee crisis and we provided direct funding of €1 million in 2017 with an additional €1.1 million allocated for 2018. Our support has focused on food, nutrition, shelter, water and sanitation.

Ireland has also supported the intensive political response by the international community which continues to be pursued.

In addition, Ireland has consistently called for an independent and impartial investigation into the serious and credible allegations of human rights violations by the Myanmar security forces. In that regard, we have strongly supported the work of the UN Fact Finding Mission and UN Special Rapporteur to Myanmar Yanghee Lee, and have asked the Government of Myanmar to cooperate with them and allow them access to the country. Their work in investigating allegations, recording victim testimony and gathering other evidence, so that it can be preserved for further criminal proceedings, is crucial to ensuring full accountability.

The recent publication of the Report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar (IIFMM) has made for harrowing reading. The report of the IIFMM notes that the crimes in Myanmar “stem from deep fractures in society and structural problems that have been apparent and unaddressed for decades.”

It is therefore imperative that Myanmar and the international community respond comprehensively to the findings of the report and its recommendations in a way that both addresses the long-standing root causes of this crisis and in a manner that ensures the perpetrators of the crimes described in the report are swiftly brought to justice.

I have taken note of the recommendations and Ireland is actively engaging with our international partners in responding to the report, including at the upcoming 39th Session of the Human Rights Council where this report will be formally presented.

My Department will continue to liaise closely with EU and other international partners to press for progress in resolving this crisis including through our Embassies in Thailand and in Vietnam who are closely monitoring the situation.

Human Rights

78. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the position regarding the situation in Venezuela; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36854/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Venezuela is currently experiencing the worst political, social, economic, and humanitarian crisis in its history. I am deeply concerned about the serious, volatile, and rapidly deteriorating situation which is increasingly affecting neighbouring countries, and countries in the region. I continue to urge the Government of Venezuela to engage in dialogue with the opposition, to respect the electoral calendar and to fully restore the country’s democratic institutions. This is essential to achieving a resolution to the crisis.

Reports of human rights violations are a cause of real concern. Freedom of speech and freedom of peaceful assembly are fundamental rights that are the bedrock of a functioning democracy, and I call on the Government of Venezuela to respect these rights. All parties must refrain from violence and work towards peaceful and democratic solutions.

The humanitarian crisis is acute, and Ireland is supportive of the EU’s funding for essential humanitarian aid in Venezuela and countries hosting Venezuelan refugees.

We are also supportive of EU sanctions on Venezuela introduced in June of this year. These sanctions are aimed at materials that can be used by the Government for internal repression, and create a legal framework for a travel ban and asset freeze against those who have shown blatant disregard for the rule of law and disrespect for democratic principles, including a number of Government officials.

While Ireland does not have a resident embassy in Caracas, the Embassy of Ireland in Mexico is responsible for our diplomatic relations with Venezuela and is monitoring the situation closely and is in contact with the EU Missions in Caracas. Officials from the Embassy, along with my officials in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Dublin, regularly engage with partner organisations on the ground, and at EU and international level.

I can assure the Deputy that Ireland will continue this engagement and that I am committed to working towards a peaceful and democratic resolution to this crisis.

Human Rights

79. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on detention centres for migrants and refugees in Libya and supported by the EU; his views on whether such centres are fully compliant in terms of upholding the human rights of refugees and migrants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36855/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am deeply troubled by the persistent human rights abuses that have been perpetrated against migrants in Libyan detention centres, as reported by the UN Human Rights Office and others. I have raised these concerns at the Foreign Affairs Council, as did the Taoiseach at the European Council in October 2017. I have repeatedly condemned these abuses, and will continue to raise my concerns at every appropriate opportunity.

I continue to be alarmed by the conditions in Libyan detention centres, which are, at the very least, often overcrowded, fail to provide for basic living standards, and, given the lawless situation in Libya, lack appropriate oversight. There are still 8,000 migrants and refugees detained in Libya, and I am concerned about reports that the UN's International Organisation for Migration (IOM) is struggling to keep up with the large number of migrants arriving in these detention centres.

While there is Libyan Government oversight in some detention centres, this needs to be vastly expanded and improved. In this regard, I reiterate my call on the Libyan Government, and all parties, including those with de facto control of territory, to take steps to eliminate ill-treatment of migrants, and to facilitate access to detention centres by UN agencies and other humanitarian organisations

It should be acknowledged that over the last year, some progress has been made in alleviating the plight of migrants in Libya, and this must be built on. While there were over 50 detention centres in operation in Libya a year ago, only 17 of these remain open today. More importantly, the effort to provide alternatives to detention seems to be bearing some fruit. For instance, I welcome the announcement by the IOM in July that the Libyan Government has agreed "in principle" that IOM would take responsibility for the care of people rescued at sea, rather than continuing use of detention centres. I call on the Libyan Government to make good on this promise as soon as possible.

Another alternative to detention which the EU has been supporting is voluntary repatriation, voluntary return, and humanitarian return of migrants from Libya. This can be a difficult process, but we have seen marked progress here too, with the IOM reporting that it has now safely returned nearly 11,000 migrants from Libya as of the first half of 2018.

Ultimately, bringing real improvements to the lives of Libyans and migrants, and ensuring an end to human rights abuses, will require restoration of political stability and an end to lawlessness in Libya. This requires the formation of a fully functioning and unified government,

and a return to order throughout the country. I call on all parties to cooperate fully with UN Special Representative Ghassan Salamé, whose efforts Ireland and the EU fully support. The EU will continue to work with the UN and others to support and reinforce Libya's sovereign institutions.

In this context, the escalating violence in Tripoli in recent weeks is deeply troubling, as it has the potential to further destabilise the political crisis in Libya. I welcome the ceasefire agreed earlier this week, and call on all parties involved to respect its terms. Clashes such as these must not be allowed to distract from the political process aimed at reaching a sustainable solution to the crisis, which is ultimately the only way to bring an end to the suffering of the Libyan people, and the migrants and refugees present in the country.

Northern Ireland

80. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on recent efforts made to restart the Executive in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36856/18]

82. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade when further talks will be held with the political parties in Northern Ireland and the Secretary of State regarding the need to have the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive restored; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36870/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 80 and 82 together.

The Good Friday Agreement is the indispensable framework for providing stable, inclusive, power-sharing government for all the people of Northern Ireland and for sustaining our interlocking relationships – within Northern Ireland, on the island of Ireland, and between the UK and Ireland.

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

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

A meeting of the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference took place on 25 July 2018, at which Minister Flanagan and I represented the Government. I look forward to engaging further with the British Government through the Conference, as we continue to work together as co-guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement to secure the effective operation of all of the institutions of the Agreement.

I remain in very regular contact with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Karen Bradley, as we seek a way beyond the current impasse with the devolved institutions. We met most recently on 24 August in Dublin and spoke by phone on 5 September. I am deeply concerned at the continuing impasse in Northern Ireland and I have conveyed that concern to Secretary of State Bradley, which she shares.

On 6 September, Secretary of State Bradley, announced proposed temporary amendments to the legislative framework for the calling of an Assembly election, in the continuing absence of

the Northern Ireland Executive. This underlines the seriousness of the absence of the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland, and the urgent requirement for all with responsibilities to do everything in their power to get them operating again.

The strong and consistent calls from across all sections of the community in Northern Ireland for the devolved institutions to operate must be heeded.

It is welcome that a dialogue commenced between the political parties last week. I want to see this followed up on with a political process that can secure an agreement on the operation of the devolved institutions.

I will be engaging further with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on how both Governments can most effectively support that urgent work in the period immediately ahead.

Question No. 81 answered with Question No. 77.

Question No. 82 answered with Question No. 80.

Question No. 83 answered with Question No. 65.

Brexit Issues

84. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of Ireland's contingency planning in the event of a no-deal Brexit; the specific actions that have been taken since the Government announced in July 2018 that it was stepping up their preparations for a no-deal Brexit, in particular the recruitment of extra officers for ports and airports; the progress made to date in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36906/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Government's contingency planning for Brexit was initiated well in advance of the UK referendum in June 2016 and since my appointment as Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade in May 2017 I have overseen a sustained intensification of these efforts. To this end, co-ordination of the whole-of-Government response to Brexit is being taken forward through the cross-Departmental coordination structures chaired by my Department and on 18 July I presented a detailed Memorandum to the Government on Brexit Preparedness and Contingency Planning.

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, was identified as an early priority and 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 has provided 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. This is enabling the modelling of potential responses under different scenarios, such as one where a withdrawal agreement, including a transitional arrangement, is concluded and where a Free Trade Agreement is the basis for the future relationship between the EU and the UK.

On the basis of this work, relevant Departments have now been tasked by the Government to rollout detailed Action Plans with a view to advancing, as appropriate, the mitigating measures which have been identified in the areas of their responsibility from the planning to the

implementation phase.

In line with this approach, the Government has already approved a number of key Brexit preparedness measures focused on East-West trade and has mandated the presentation to Government before the end of September of detailed and costed proposals on the staffing, IT, infrastructural and operational requirements for the implementation at ports and airports of the necessary customs controls and sanitary and phytosanitary checks required as a result of the UK's withdrawal from the EU.

All of this work is in addition to measures that have already been put in place 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. Capital expenditure of €116bn over the coming decade under Project Ireland 2040 will also 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 46 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.

In addition to the work at home, we are engaging actively with the European Commission's Article 50 Taskforce and its Brexit Preparedness Unit on areas where the lead policy role lies with the EU.

Brexit Supports

85. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has recently raised at EU level the issue of the EU establishing a fund to help and support countries and industries most exposed to Brexit; if so, the EU's views on such a fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36907/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): There is already a very strong awareness and understanding at EU level of the potentially significant and unique economic impacts of Brexit on Ireland and an openness to exploring ways in which the EU can play a helpful and supportive role.

This was a particular focus of my meeting with EU Budget Commissioner, Gunther Oettinger, during his visit to Dublin in March, and in subsequent follow-up contacts. Commissioner Oettinger also met with the Taoiseach, Minister Donohoe and Minister of State D'Arcy during his visit, which was focused on the negotiations for the EU's 2021-27 Multiannual Financial Framework. The potential availability of support, if needed, for Ireland, and indeed for other countries or regions which might be affected by Brexit, will be considered during the MFF negotiations, which are at an early stage. I am glad that the Commission's MFF proposals include a basis for taking that work forward.

At present, the European Investment Bank is already providing support for the Government's Brexit Loan Scheme.

My colleague, the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, is also working actively, with the support of other relevant Departments, with the European Commission to scope and design schemes to support enterprises impacted by Brexit in line with State Aid rules. The EU Commission has approved a ‘rescue and restructuring’ scheme, which provides support to SMEs experiencing acute liquidity needs as a result of Brexit.

The Government is also working intensively to safeguard the significant financial support there has been for the border region of Ireland and for Northern Ireland, with almost €2.4 billion of EU funding having been provided for successive PEACE and INTERREG programmes. The current programmes have a combined value of over €550 million over the period 2014-2020, of which 85% is funded through the European Regional Development Fund. I welcome the Commission’s most recent proposal for a special new PEACE PLUS programme as part of the next MFF which will build on and continue the work of successive PEACE and INTERREG programmes.

Departmental Staff Data

86. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the embassies worldwide which have enterprise attachés stationed; and the number of such attachés stationed in each such specific embassy by city and country. [36921/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Advancing Ireland’s trade, tourism, education and investment objectives through economic diplomacy and related activities is at the forefront of Ireland’s foreign policy and is reflected in our approach to engaging with global challenges as set out in *The Global Island: Ireland’s Foreign Policy for a Changing World*. The Embassy network currently comprises 82 Embassies, Consulates and multilateral offices. It plays a crucial role in supporting Irish businesses to grow overseas; in promoting our wider trade interests including through EU and WTO regulation; in addressing market access issues; and in supporting Ministerial visits and trade missions, as part of Team Ireland. The Embassy network is an important resource for our state agencies through its active support of their daily work and strategic objectives in overseas markets. The Embassy network is an invaluable asset for trade promotion in locations with limited or no state agency presence. In an evolving and increasingly challenging global economic and trading environment, our Embassy network is working to further Ireland’s economic objectives overseas and promote Ireland’s attractiveness as a destination to live, study, work, visit, and do business. The strategy framework for this is our trade and investment promotion policy *Ireland Connected*. Approval has been given for the recruitment in a select number of Embassies and Consulates of additional local staff with the requisite skills and experience to expand and enhance economic and promotional activities, to deepen market penetration and diversification, to enhance our economic and public diplomacy, and to raise our global visibility.

A list is set out below:

Country	City	Number of Posts
Argentina	Buenos Aires	1 (also covering Chile)
Germany	Berlin	1
Indonesia	Jakarta	1
Italy	Rome	1
Kenya	Nairobi	1
Netherlands	The Hague	1

Country	City	Number of Posts
Nigeria	Abuja	1
Poland	Warsaw	1
Romania	Bucharest	1 (also covering Bulgaria)
Vietnam	Hanoi	1

Disabled Drivers and Passengers Scheme

87. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Finance if the lengthy waiting times for appeals to be heard by the disabled drivers medical board of appeal will be investigated (details supplied). [35878/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I have been informed by the Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal that the current waiting list is around four to five months. I am further informed that the Board will endeavor to reduce waiting times in the coming months, with an increasing number of hearings in comparison to the summer months. My officials will continue to monitor the waiting times.

Haulage Industry

88. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Finance if road hauliers will be protected from measures introduced in budget 2019 in regard to the carbon tax; if other compensatory measures will be introduced in order to offset a rise in fuel costs (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36245/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, it is a longstanding practice of the Minister for Finance not to comment, in advance of the Budget, on any tax matters that might be the subject of Budget decisions.

Haulage Industry

89. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Finance the reason road hauliers that have had to upgrade their fleets to more environmentally friendly vehicles have not been supported in regard to the carbon tax; if consideration will be given to those that have invested heavily in economically friendly vehicles; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36247/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, it is a longstanding practice of the Minister for Finance not to comment, in advance of the Budget, on any tax matters that might be the subject of Budget decisions.

NAMA Portfolio

90. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Finance the number of housing units delivered by NAMA to date; the details of these units by scheme; the further units that will be made available by NAMA by scheme for the remainder of 2018 and 2019 as part of its target to deliver over 23,000 housing units by the end of 2030; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36515/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): At the outset, it is important to note that NAMA does not build residential property. Instead, where commercially viable, it funds residential delivery on sites controlled by its debtors and receivers. NAMA is making a significant contribution to the supply of housing within the State and has committed to facilitating the delivery of 20,000 residential units by the end of 2020, when the agency is due to wind up.

As of August 2018, I am advised that NAMA has delivered over 7,800 new residential units as part of its residential delivery programme. A further 2,800 homes are under construction and full planning permission has been granted for 7,800 units. Planning has been lodged, or will be lodged in the next 12 months for an additional 10,200 homes. Finally, pre-planning or feasibility work is underway on sites that have a delivery capacity for just over 15,000 residential units.

In addition, NAMA has an established policy of identifying to Local Authorities and approved housing bodies, properties within its portfolio which may be suitable for social housing. To date 6,984 such properties have been identified, with demand confirmed for 2,717 and 2,474 delivered or committed. Part of this delivery has been through NAMA's innovative National Asset Residential Property Services (NARPS) model, which has purchased nearly 1,300 properties from NAMA debtors and leased them on for social housing.

Tax Code

91. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance the reason a tax is imposed on movement of goods, that is, cars (details supplied); when tariff-free trade will be allowed; and if refunds will issue to persons that have been overcharged. [36780/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am informed by Revenue that the Finance Act 1992, Part II, Chapter IV provides for the application of a duty of excise on motor vehicles called Vehicle Registration Tax (VRT). Section 132 of the 1992 Act provides that the tax is to be charged at the time the vehicle is declared for registration or conversion. The tax is therefore not imposed on, and nor is it related to, the movement of goods.

The tax base used to calculate the VRT applicable, called the Open Market Selling Price (OMSP), is provided for in section 133 of the 1992 Act and is defined as “the price, inclusive of all taxes and duties” that a vehicle “might reasonably be expected to fetch on a first arm’s length sale thereof in the open market in the State by retail”. The definition provides that the market price, the OMSP, includes all taxes, including VRT, and does not constitute double taxation nor give rise to overpayments.

No tariffs apply to goods in free circulation in another EU Member State that are brought into Ireland. Tariffs on goods imported from other countries depend on the details of any trade agreement between the EU and that country.

Immigration Controls

92. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the number of visits either planned or unannounced that were attended by officers from the Revenue Commissioners relating to immigration bureau officer visits to the 12 other public licensed aerodromes not including the three State airports and 13 private licensed aerodromes by aerodrome from 1 January 2016 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36452/18]

151. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the number of Revenue

Commissioners customs and excise officer visits to the 12 other public licensed aerodromes not including the three State airports and the 13 private licensed aerodromes by aerodrome; the number of planned and unannounced visits from 1 January 2016 to 2017 and to date in 2018; the number of visits either planned or unannounced that were also attended by officers from An Garda Síochána; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36450/18]

152. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the number of Revenue Commissioners customs and excise officer visits to sea and river ports and or docks by port and or dock; the number of planned and unannounced visits from 1 January 2016 to 2017 and to date in 2018; the number of visits either planned or unannounced that were also attended by officers from An Garda Síochána; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36451/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 92, 151 and 152 together.

In relation to Question 36450/18, I am advised by Revenue that according to the Irish Aviation Authority there are currently 10 public licenced aerodromes apart from the three State airports. These are the five regional airports at Donegal, Sligo, Ireland West (Knock), Kerry and Waterford and the five aerodromes licensed for public use at Connemara, Inis Mór, Inis Meáin, Inis Oírr and Weston.

I am advised by Revenue that a decision by them to undertake a visit to any aerodrome is based on Revenue's assessment of risk, having regard to a range of factors, including intelligence. Such visits are normally unannounced, but may from time to time be announced visits having regard to Revenue's particular focus and engagement in the context of a visit. Officers from An Garda Síochána did not accompany Revenue officers on any of these visits.

A table detailing the statistical information requested is attached.

Table: Aerodrome visits by Revenue Customs from 1 Jan 2016 to 31 August 2018

Aerodrome/Airport	Announced	Unannounced
Kerry	0	136
Donegal	0	9
Inis Meáin	0	0
Inis Mór	0	4
Inis Oírr	0	0
Ireland West (Knock)	0	275
Connemara	8	17
Sligo	0	17
Waterford	0	10
Weston	2	87
Grand Total	10	555

In relation to Question 36451/18, I am advised by Revenue that in the period from 1 January 2016 until 31 August 2018 there were 4,794 visits to ports, harbours and marinas. A decision by Revenue to undertake a visit to any such facility is based on Revenue's assessment of risk, having regard to a range of factors, including intelligence. Such visits are normally unannounced, but may from time to time be announced having regard to Revenue's particular focus and engagement in the context of a visit. Officers from An Garda Síochána accompanied Revenue officers on 144 visits.

The following table sets out the statistical information requested.

Table : Port, Harbour and Marina visits by Revenue Customs from 1 Jan 2016 to 31 August 2018

Ports, Harbours, Marinas
Adrigole
Arklow
Askeaton
Aughinish
Arklow
Ballyglass
Ballynacally
Ballysteen Pier
Ballyvaughan
Baltimore
Bantry
Belview
Caherciveen
Carrigaholt Piers
Carlingford
Castletownbere
Castletownshend
Cobh
Cork City
Crosshaven
Customs House Quay, Cork
Dingle
Dinish Island
Doonbeg pier
Drogheda
Dublin Port
Dundalk
Dun Laoghaire
Dunmore East
Fenit
Foynes
Galway
Goleen
Glandore
Glin Pier
Greencastle
Greenore
Greystones
Horgan's Quay
Howth
Killadysert Pier
Killybegs

Ports, Harbours, Marinas
Kilmore Quay
Kilrush
Kilteery Pier
Kinsale
Lawerence Cove
Limerick
Liscannor Pier
Marino Point
Monkstown, Cork
Moneypoint
New Ross
Passage
Port Magee
Querrin Pier
Ringaskiddy
Ringmoylan Pier
Rossaveal
Rosslare Harbour
Schull
Sherkin Island
Sligo
South Jetties
Tarbert
Tivoli
Union Hall
Valentia
Wicklow
Waterford
Youghal
Sub Total
Other visits (These are visits by Revenue Maritime staff or Revenue Customs Cutters to locations e.g. piers and slipways, as part of a risk assessment of potential landing spots for prohibited and restricted goods. A breakdown by location is not available)
Full Total

In relation to Question 36452/18, I am advised by Revenue that according to the Irish Aviation Authority there are currently 10 public licenced aerodromes apart from the three State airports. These are the five regional airports at Donegal, Sligo, Ireland West (Knock), Kerry and Waterford and the five aerodromes licensed for public use at Connemara, Inis Mór, Inis Meáin, Inis Oírr and Weston.

I am advised by Revenue that between the period 1 Jan 2016 to 31 August 2018 there were 565 visits by Revenue Customs of which 10 visits were announced and 555 visits were unannounced. No officers from An Garda Síochána, which includes the Garda National Immigration Bureau, accompanied Revenue officers on any of these visits.

Tax Reliefs Application

93. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance if he will consider reintroducing tax relief on trade union subscriptions on a par with tax relief for professional bodies; the estimated cost of introducing the relief at the employee's marginal rate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35422/18]

95. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to restore tax relief for union subscriptions, which was removed in budget 2011 and which is common practice in many other countries; the reason tax relief on subscriptions to professional bodies has been maintained while tax relief on trade union subscriptions have not been restored; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35496/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 93 and 95 together.

The 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.

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

Regarding tax relief for trade union membership subscriptions, 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.”

Regarding the issue of tax relief on subscriptions to professional bodies, I refer the deputies to the section of the review which addressed this matter, stating:

“There is a fundamental difference between membership of a professional body which is required to practice that profession and membership of a trade union, which is essentially, a personal choice.

Professional bodies often have a regulatory function, governing standards within a particular sector or industry, with practitioners or employees often required to be a member of a professional body in order to engage in employment in particular fields.

A person cannot be refused the right of employment for failure to join a trade union. By contrast, a person can be refused the right of employment as a solicitor, for example, if they fail to hold a practicing certificate.”

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

Regarding the specific enquiry on the estimated cost of the relief if it were re-introduced and provided at the employee's marginal rate, the following table sets out details of the cost of

the relief in the seven years immediately prior to its end.

Year	Cost (€ million)	No. of Claims
2004	10.7	248,300
2005	11.8	272,100
2006	19.2	294,300
2007	20.7	316,300
2008	26.4	341,900
2009	26.7	345,800
2010	26	337,500

I am advised by Revenue that while these figures may not provide an accurate indicator of future costs of a new scheme, there is no other basis available to Revenue on which to estimate such costs.

Vehicle Registration

94. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Finance the reason the vehicle registration tax calculator calculates a different value for a vehicle that been imported than for a similar vehicle being exported. [35437/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that it provides public access to a vehicle valuation database via an online VRT calculator, which is located on its website at www.revenue.ie. This VRT calculator is dual purpose and can be used to show the Open Market Selling Price ‘OMSP’ and VRT payable on imported vehicles as well as the ‘OMSP’ and VRT repayable on exported vehicles.

When using the calculator, the customer is provided with the option to select either a ‘vehicle VRT calculation’ or a ‘vehicle export enquiry’. Once the selection is made the VRT calculator takes account of the different rules that apply in arriving at a VRT payable amount as compared to a VRT repayable amount and I am assured it is operating correctly in this regard.

The calculator will provide different values if the user is not perfectly consistent in the inputs and selections made in each enquiry, such as mileage, age, transmission, doors, engine type, body type, engine capacity, and version. It will also provide different values if both enquiries are not made on the same day, and Revenue has amended the valuation details in the relevant statistical code.

Finally, Revenue has confirmed to me that its Central Vehicle Office will contact the Deputy’s office to ascertain if he wishes to discuss a specific case.

Question No. 95 answered with Question No. 93.

Departmental Expenditure

96. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of the contracting out of secure printing by his Department in 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018. [35531/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Department has not incurred any costs in the contracting out of secure printing in 2016, 2017 or 2018, to date.

The Department has an in-house Print Room. None of the work completed would be considered secure printing.

Banking Operations

97. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Finance if he will request a bank to issue a refusal letter to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35558/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy may be aware that, as Minister for Finance, I have no direct function in the relationship between banks and their customers. Decisions taken by banks in this regard, and the manner in which they conduct their day-to-day operations, are matters for the board and management of the respective banks.

Notwithstanding the fact that the State has shareholdings in some of the banks, I must ensure that these institutions are run on a commercial, cost effective and independent basis to protect their value as assets to the State. Accordingly, it would not be appropriate for me to intervene in the case of an individual customer. Relationship Frameworks have been specified that define the nature of the relationship between the Minister for Finance and the banks and these Frameworks are available on my Department's website.

As the circumstance described by you is a matter concerning a bank, the individual involved should continue to engage with the bank. Should the matter not be resolved to the individual's satisfaction, they can refer the matter to the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman.

Tax Code

98. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if the Revenue Commissioners invoke section 122(3) of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 in circumstances (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35581/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I would like to draw the Deputy's attention to my reply to Parliamentary Question No. 188 of 29 May 2018 and to Parliamentary Question No. 171 of 10 July 2018 which are relevant to this matter.

I am advised by Revenue, and as I have stated in the replies to which I have referred, where an employer can show to the satisfaction of Revenue that the employee (current or former) has no loans on preferential terms and that the outcome of the write off would be the same for the employee or former employee as it would be for a non-employee customer of the bank, then any write off will not attract a tax liability in accordance with section 122(3) of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997.

Tax Collection

99. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance the arrangements in place for the Revenue Commissioners to collect from self-employed persons combined income tax, USC and PRSI liability through the Revenue Commissioner's self-assessment system in respect of the year in which a self-employed person reaches 66 years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35636/18]

100. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance the situation in which the Revenue Commissioners collect the combined income tax, USC and PRSI liability in respect of all tax years up to and including when a self-employed person reaches 65 years of age; the number of persons this relates to; the arrangements the Revenue Commissioners have to collect the 66th year payment; the number of persons this payment is not collected from in respect of the 66th year; the estimated loss arising from same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35637/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 99 and 100 together.

As the questions relate to the collection of combined income tax, USC and PRSI liabilities, I propose taking them together. I am advised by Revenue that self-employed persons are generally taxed under the self-assessment system in Part 41A of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997. Under Part 41A, a taxpayer is required to submit a tax return to Revenue by 31 October in the year following the tax year to which the return relates (or by mid-November, if paying and filing through ROS) and pay any balance of the liability (net of preliminary tax paid) in respect of income tax, USC and PRSI for the year to the Collector-General at the same time. Where a self-employed individual discharges the combined income tax, USC and PRSI liability through the self-assessment system, a single payment is made in respect of the combined liability for all complete tax years up to and including the year in which he or she reaches their 65th year. Where an individual is aged 66 or over in a tax year, PRSI is not chargeable for that year under the self-assessment system. However, an individual who wishes to pay PRSI in respect of a period immediately prior to their 66th birthday should make the necessary arrangements with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Client Eligibility Services, Government Buildings, Cork Road, Waterford.

A taxpayer who has income taxed under the PAYE system (such as a private pension or salary) and who also has taxable non-PAYE income (for example, from self-employment) may, in certain circumstances, where such income does not exceed €5,000 request Revenue to reduce their annual PAYE tax credits and rate band entitlements, so that the tax on their non-PAYE income is deducted by their pension provider or employer. Any such taxpayer is not considered a chargeable person for self-assessment purposes and has no obligation to file an annual tax return under the self-assessment system. Revenue may, however, request a tax return from such taxpayers.

Any further information that may be required in respect of PRSI liabilities for self-employed persons in their 66th year or the eligibility of such persons for social welfare benefits may be sought from the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection. Revenue has confirmed that it does not maintain statistics in respect of either the number of persons the payment is not collected from or the estimated loss arising from same.

Home Renovation Incentive Scheme Administration

101. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to extend the home renovation incentive scheme for 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35646/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In accordance with the relevant provisions of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, the Home Renovation Incentive is due to expire at the end of this year. As with all such time limited incentives, I will consider the future of this measure in the context of my preparations for the forthcoming Finance Bill. As part of that work, my officials are carrying out the appropriate ex-post evaluation of the incentive having

regard to the criteria set out in my Department's Tax Expenditure Guidelines.

Tax Appeals Commission

102. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance the number of cases in which the Tax Appeals Commission has made a determination and direction to the Revenue Commissioners in respect of cases in which it has not implemented the direction in full in each of the years 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018; the estimated tax liability involved in these cases in each year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35648/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In response to the Deputy's question, I am informed by the Tax Appeals Commission (TAC) that it does not have an enforcement role to ensure that the Revenue Commissioners (Revenue) comply with determinations made by the Appeal Commissioners. Revenue are legally bound to comply with these decisions in accordance with section 949AM of the Taxes Consolidation Act (TCA), 1997. Pursuant to that provision, Revenue shall give effect to any determination made by the Appeal Commissioners unless the appeal has been appealed to the High Court in accordance with sections 949AP and 949AQ TCA 1997.

I am advised by Revenue that the making of a determination by the TAC is typically the final stage of a tax appeal, unless the determination is then appealed to the High Court. In giving effect to a determination against a tax assessment, Revenue is required to calculate the tax chargeable (if any) in respect of the amount assessed to tax. The result will be a withdrawal or amendment of the assessment, the making of a refund or the collection of any outstanding tax.

Section 949E(1) TCA 1997 allows the TAC to give a direction to Revenue (and to appellants) in relation to the conduct or disposal of an appeal. It is open to both Revenue and appellants to apply to the TAC to have a direction amended, suspended or set aside. Such an application is typically made where the parties (i.e. Revenue and appellants) are not in a position to comply with the time limits imposed by the TAC for the submission of certain types of information or documentation and request additional time to comply with the direction. As directions are essentially related to procedural matters associated with the particular appeal, Revenue does not compile statistics on directions given to it by the TAC.

A determination of an appeal is not a direction and cannot be amended, suspended or set aside. As determinations are made by the TAC on an ongoing basis, at any point in time there will be determinations yet to be implemented by Revenue. However, statistics on such cases are not compiled and are not available. Such instances would be rare and of not unreasonable duration given the statutory requirement for Revenue to give effect to determinations made by the TAC. In any event, as the appeal has been determined at this stage, the tax liability would no longer be estimated but would be established in line with the TAC determination.

There are currently fewer than ten determinations made by the TAC that are under appeal to the High Court and in relation to which the final tax liability has not yet been decided. The tax in dispute for these cases is approximately €3 million.

Tax Credits

103. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Finance the percentage of the total cost of the research and development tax credit which relates to expenditure incurred by businesses on items (details supplied). [35683/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that statistical information in respect of research and development tax credit is published on the Revenue website at www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/tax-expenditures/r-and-d-tax-credits.aspx. It is not possible to provide a breakdown of the cost of the credit by business items as the amounts claimed in respect of plant and machinery, scientific research, buildings and other expenditure are aggregated before being offset against tax in the year or being carried forward to a later year as unused credit.

Additionally, information in respect of royalties and expenses deductible for trading purposes are not available in respect of claims of research and development tax credit.

Mortgage Interest Rates

104. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance the reason the average rate for a new mortgage here is so high (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35684/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, there are a number of factors that influence mortgage interest rates in Ireland. These include the high level of non-performing loans (NPLs), the low rate of repossessions, a reduced number of banks in the system and the high proportion of tracker rate mortgages on the bank books.

In line with the continuing economic recovery, the level of mortgage arrears and non-performing loans has now declined from the peak but they are still significantly higher than most other euro zone countries. High holdings of NPLs reduces profitability, increases funding costs and ties up bank capital, which has a negative impact on the supply of new credit. All of these factors feed through to higher interest rates for new mortgages. Ireland's NPL ratio was 13.3% at Q1 in 2018 compared to an EU average of 4%.

There is a very low rate of repossessions in Ireland. The lower risk rating that secured lending attracts is compromised because the realisation of collateral is a lengthy and difficult process. As mentioned previously in relation to NPLs, our low rate of repossessions leads to a lower supply of new credit and higher interest rates than would otherwise be the case for the market as a whole in the future.

Competition has been reduced due to a decline in active lenders from 12 ten years ago to five now. This is likely to be a contributing factor, along with the high level of NPLs, to the fact that Central Bank research from May 2015 found that the spread between official ECB rates and standard variable rate is relatively high and that new lending rates are above average compared to European peers.

Furthermore, the Central Bank undertook research in the area of mortgage switching in 2017 through a public consultation with the objective of considering some possible changes to the Consumer Protection Code to further promote switching in the mortgage market. This was to build on the measures introduced last year which required lenders to provide more information to borrowers on how they set and adjust standard variable rate (SVR) mortgages and also to improve the level of information they provide to borrowers about their other mortgage products which could provide savings for the SVR borrower. The Central Bank published their responses to the submissions they received in June this year and an Addendum for Enhanced Mortgage Switching Measures: Transparency and Switching will come into effect on 1 January 2019. Among the changes that will be introduced are:

- The introduction of a fixed rate transparency measure which introduces a 60 day notifica-

tion period for consumers whose rate is about to expire.

- There will be enhanced mortgage transparency measures on variable rates on Loan-to-Value (LTV) which would mean lenders would notify consumers on an annual basis of whether they can, or cannot, move LTV interest rate bands, subject to the provision of an up-to-date valuation to their lender. If the particular lender doesn't allow for such movement between LTV bands, they must notify the consumer that other banks may offer such movement.

- A measure to improve the transparency of incentives linked to mortgages will be introduced to ensure sufficient clarity for the consumer and the advertising of same.

- In terms of potential switching savings measures, on request of the consumer, lenders will be required to provide existing borrowers with an indicative comparison with alternative or new rates offered by that regulated entity only but also they will have to provide a link to the CCPC website that allows customers make sure they are availing of the best available interest rate.

- All lenders will provide standardised information on the mortgage process and if switching, both the original and new mortgage lender will establish a switching point of contact/switch team.

- All lenders will provide redemption figures to the consumer or their legal representative within 5 days and will keep the consumer updated throughout the mortgage process with specific timelines for the different parts of the process.

As the Deputy can see, the higher rates charged for new mortgages in Ireland versus other European countries stem from a range of factors such as the high level of NPLs. The ongoing recovery in our economy, which is reflected in strong employment growth, is helping to reduce the levels of NPLs, together with the range of initiatives and protections introduced for those in mortgage arrears.

The Government is of the opinion that increased competition and switching in the market, rather than administrative controls, remains the best way to ensure that retail lending rates are driven down in a sustainable way for the market as a whole but without giving rise to potentially undesirable consequences for the provision of new mortgage lending.

Enterprise Support Schemes

105. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Finance the status of an application by a person (details supplied). [35714/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Start Up Refunds for Entrepreneurs (SURE) is an income tax incentive aimed at encouraging individuals to become entrepreneurs. Where an individual who was in full time employment sets up their own company, and takes up full time employment with that company, they are entitled to set the amount invested against their taxable income in the six years prior to their investment. In this way, they receive a tax refund to support them in their new venture.

With regard to the specific query raised by the Deputy on behalf of a taxpayer, Revenue have advised me that the application was approved for relief on 1 August 2018.

Disabled Drivers and Passengers Scheme

106. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance if a VAT and or VRT exemption on vehicles for service providers (details supplied) for persons with intellectual disabilities will be considered in view of the fact that many of the service users also have physical disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35743/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Section 92 of the Finance Act 1989 and Statutory Instrument No 55/2018 set out the criteria under which charitable organisations can claim a repayment of VRT and VAT paid on specially constructed or adapted vehicles under the Drivers and Passengers with Disabilities Scheme.

To qualify under the scheme, an organisation must be a charitable organisation within the meaning of the Charities Act 2009 (No. 6 of 2009), that is –

- (a) entered in the register of charitable organisations under Part 3 of that Act, and
- (b) whose purpose is to provide services to persons with disabilities, and
- (c) in furtherance of that purpose, is engaged in the care and transport of disabled persons.

An applicant must qualify under all the conditions outlined above and adapted vehicles must be used to transport persons who are severely and permanently disabled and who hold a Primary Medical Certificate.

The organisation in question submitted an application under the Scheme to Revenue in late 2017 but failed to respond to a request for further information, which is still outstanding. Revenue has recently written to the organisation in regard to its application and can be contacted at low cost telephone number 1890 60 60 61 if any additional advice or assistance is required

Mortgage Book Sales

107. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the level of advance knowledge he had of the plans by a bank (details supplied) to sell a loanbook; if he has met and or communicated with other banks regarding the sale of loanbooks and bundled mortgages to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35750/18]

142. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the level of advance knowledge he had of the plans by a bank (details supplied) to sell a loanbook to companies; if he has met and or communicated with other banks regarding the sale of loanbooks and bundles mortgages in 2017 or to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36326/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 107 and 142 together.

In the first instance, I should highlight for the Deputy that in my role as Minister for Finance, I cannot stop loan sales even by the banks in which the State has a shareholding. These decisions are the responsibility of the Board and management of the banks which must be run on an independent and commercial basis. The banks' independence is protected by Relationship Frameworks which are legally binding documents which I cannot change unilaterally. These frameworks, which are publicly available, were insisted upon by the European Commission to protect competition in the Irish market.

The interaction between both Department officials and myself and senior management of the banks in which the State has an investment takes place on a regular basis. As part of their ongoing engagement with the banks, Department officials meet with bank management during

which a wide range of topics are discussed, including loan sales where relevant. Subsequent to these meetings, Department officials brief me as required. In addition to these meetings, I meet directly with the CEOs of each of the banks from time to time and loan sales would be included as an agenda item again where relevant.

In relation specifically to the recently announced loan sale by PTSB, Project Glas, I was first informed by Department officials of the proposed transaction on Friday 19th January. Department officials were first briefed on the timing of the sale and potential composition of the portfolio, earlier that week.

Notwithstanding a loan sale, I wish to highlight that the protections for borrowers in place before the sale remain unchanged. In this regard, it is important to note that there are no changes to the rights of a borrower whose loan is sold by a bank. All terms and conditions attached to their mortgage contract remain in place. I should also highlight that regardless of the protections that are currently in place for mortgage holders, I am prepared to engage with Deputies from other parties in an effort to see if these protections can be strengthened further in a sensible manner. This commitment has been demonstrated recently by the Government's support for the Bill introduced by Deputy Michael McGrath, T.D., which seeks to regulate the purchasers of mortgage loans.

In addition, earlier this year I asked the Central Bank to carry out a review of the CCMA to ensure it remains as effective as possible. I have asked for the report to be completed as soon as is practicable. The Central Bank has stated that it is their intention to deliver the report by the end of September 2018. If as a result of this review the CCMA requires amendment, a full public consultation process would be required in line with normal guidelines.

Tax Credits

108. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to amend the earned income tax credit for farmers and increase it from its 2018 level of €1,150 to €1,650; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35759/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Programme for a Partnership Government contains a commitment to increase the Earned Income Credit to €1,650.

The Budget 2018 increase of €200 was a significant further step in that direction.

The extent to which it may be possible to make further progress in this regard will depend on the overall resources available to me in the context of Budget 2019. As the Deputy will appreciate, with just over four weeks to go to the Budget, I cannot give any specific indications of my intentions at this time.

Tax Code

109. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to address income volatility among farmers and extend income averaging, greater flexibility on step out and provision of a deposit scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35760/18]

110. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to maintain a number of taxation measures that encourage farm transfer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35761/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 109 and 110 together.

Decisions on taxation matters including decisions (if any) in relation to farm transfer or income stabilisation measures are made in the context of the annual Budget process, and the Deputy will understand that I cannot give any indications of my plans for Budget 2019 at this time.

As the Deputy may also be aware, the 2014 Agri-tax Review was commissioned to examine agri-taxation measures and to make recommendations to ensure resources are directed towards activities of maximum benefit to the sector. This was a joint initiative between the Department of Finance and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. The review brought forward 25 recommendations. These recommendations are grouped into 6 broad categories that reflect government priorities: increase the mobility and the productive use of land, assist succession, complement wider agriculture policies and schemes, alternative farming models such as farm partnerships, responses to increasing income volatility, and general recommendations. In particular, the review recommended the following measures to support and promote inter-generational transfer of farms:

- Retain Agricultural Relief from Capital Acquisitions Tax.
- Target Agricultural Relief from Capital Acquisitions Tax to qualified or full-time farmers or to land owners who lease land out on a long-term basis
- Retain Retirement Relief from Capital Gains Tax at current levels. For transfers under Retirement Relief, extend the eligible letting period of a qualifying asset to 25 years.
- For transfers other than to a child under Retirement Relief, as a once-off measure until the end of 2016, allow conacre lettings as eligible.
- Extend Stamp Duty Consanguinity Relief on Non-Residential Transfers to the end of 2017.
- Retain current stamp duty exemptions on transfers of land.

In 2017, the Minister Agriculture, Food and the Marine and I committed to establish an inter-departmental working group to review and assess the progress made on the implementation of tax measure recommendations contained in the Agri-taxation Review 2014 and to take stock of relevant changes in the environment in which the agri-sector operates. Work on this study is underway and its terms of reference are as follows:

1. A summary of the context, background and process of the Agri-tax Review.
2. An update of the context since the completion of the Agri-tax Review, to include: Brexit, Climate change 2020, the abolition of milk quotas.
3. A summary of outcome of Agri-taxation Review & implementation in Budgets 2015, 2016 & 2017, including a summary table of the recommendations and their implementation/current status. In particular, regard should be had to:
 1. Analysing income stabilisation and the proposed farm deposit scheme, including a public consultation process and resultant submissions from stakeholders, and
 2. the recommendation in the Agri-tax Review on data collection and management in order to comply with state-aid requirements.
 3. The mapping of direct and tax expenditure supports available to the agricultural sector.

4. Any other matters arising in the course of the review.

I expect the study to be completed shortly.

Tax Code

111. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance his views on making it mandatory for high earners to file a tax return; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35770/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that all taxpayers who are chargeable persons under the self-assessment rules in Part 41A of the Taxes Consolidation Act (TCA) 1997 must file an annual tax return and pay any resultant tax to Revenue.

PAYE taxpayers are not required to file a tax return except in the following circumstances:

1. Individuals who are subject to the high earner's restriction set out in Chapter 2A of Part 15 of the TCA 1997 are treated as chargeable persons for any year in which that restriction applies. Consequently, such individuals are required to make a self-assessment tax return for the year in question. The high earner's restriction effectively imposes a limit on the amount of certain tax reliefs that may be availed of by high income individuals. In general, the restriction applies where an individual has adjusted income of €125,000 or more in a tax year, but can apply at a lower level where the individual has ring-fenced income, for example, interest which is subject to Deposit Interest Retention Tax. The individuals concerned must also provide details of the restriction to Revenue on Form RR1.

2. Individuals (excluding certain company directors who are treated as chargeable persons and are required to file an annual self-assessment tax return) who have combined taxable profits from non-PAYE income of not more than €5,000 per annum and who elect to pay the tax due on such profits through the PAYE system. Where an election is made, the individual must complete a tax return for that tax year when requested to so by Revenue.

3. Individuals who are requested to do so by Revenue. Each year Revenue requires a return from a subset of PAYE taxpayers based on various criteria including income.

I am also advised that PAYE Modernisation will result in the real time reporting of income for all PAYE taxpayers. From 1 January 2019 all employers will be obliged to report to Revenue the PAYE income and the associated income tax, PRSI and USC deductions for their employees as they pay them.

I do not see that there is any need to change the current arrangements for the filing of tax returns.

Brexit Issues

112. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Finance the modelling his Department is undertaking to examine the impact of Brexit on the price of grocery goods here; the financial impact this modelling shows Brexit may have on a family's weekly shop; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35785/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Inflation has been subdued over the last number of years. When calculated based on the Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices (HICP),

inflation increased by just 0.3 per cent on an annual basis in 2017. This represents the fifth consecutive year in which inflation has been below 1 per cent. The weakness in inflation in recent years reflects inter alia the impact of euro-sterling appreciation, following the UK referendum, on consumer prices in Ireland and in particular on the price of goods.

Indeed, since the UK referendum goods prices have declined by 3½ per cent and food prices have declined by almost 5 per cent. The contraction in the price of goods reflects, in part, the importance of the UK market as a source of imported consumer goods for Ireland.

Whilst there remains significant uncertainty surrounding Brexit, it is clear that any barriers to trade will have a negative impact on Irish growth. Analysis by my Department and the ESRI suggests that in the absence of a trade deal with the UK, Irish GDP could be almost 4 per cent below what it otherwise would have been in a no-Brexit scenario after ten years.

In relation to consumer prices, ESRI research indicates that Brexit could result in a potential increase in the level of CPI of between 2 to 3 per cent, relative to a no-Brexit baseline. This is equivalent to an increase of between €892 and €1,360 in the annual cost of the consumption basket for the average household. However, this assumes that there is no switching or changes in expenditure patterns in response to the price increase and is therefore an upper bound estimate of the impact of Brexit on consumer prices.

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

Tax Exemptions

113. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to introduce an exemption from capital gains tax in cases in which a person or family move into a parent or other relative's home to act as carers and then seek to sell the original home; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35823/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Any gain made by an individual on the disposal of his/her dwelling house together with land occupied as its gardens or grounds up to an area (exclusive of the site of the residence) of one acre is exempt from capital gains tax.

For full relief to apply, the dwelling house must have been occupied by the individual as his/her principal private residence throughout his/her period of ownership of the house.

Where the house is not so occupied during the whole period of ownership, only the proportion of the gain applicable to the period of occupation is exempt. In this regard, the dwelling house is treated as having been so occupied for a period of up to a year after the cessation of occupation.

Therefore, in the case in which a person or family move into a parent or other relative's home and then seek to sell the original home, an exemption from CGT will be available on the portion of the gain for the period in which the original home was the person's only or main private residence.

Motor Insurance Costs

114. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the difficulties faced by and extortionate prices being quoted to young drivers seeking to access insurance to operate as a HGV driver; if he will request the data behind these quotes from an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35842/18]

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

In relation to young HGV drivers in particular, my officials queried this point specifically with Insurance Ireland who noted that insurers make their own individual underwriting decisions based on a combination of rating factors. Insurance Ireland also advised that its Insurance Information Service, which administers the Declined Cases Agreement, has processed one case so far in 2018 involving a HGV and the driver in that case was over 35. On a more general level however, I have received a number of representations from members of the public to highlight the cost of insurance for younger motorists and I am aware of the issue of younger drivers continuing to experience increases in their insurance premiums in spite of the fact that prices are generally in decline.

As the Deputy knows, the Cost of Insurance Working Group was established in 2016 in order to examine the factors contributing to the increasing cost of insurance and identify what short, medium and long-term measures can be introduced to help reduce the cost of insurance for consumers and businesses. The initial focus of the Working Group was the problem of rising motor insurance premiums and a broad range of issues affecting the cost of motor insurance were examined, including those raised by the Irish Road Haulage Association and the Freight Transport Association Ireland, both of whom were consulted with as part of the Working Group's consultation process. The Report, published in January 2017, made 33 recommendations and these are in the process of being implemented by Government Departments, agencies and the insurance industry. I believe that the implementation of all of the recommendations of the Cost of Insurance Working Group's Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance, and its subsequent Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance, taken together will make a difference to the pricing of insurance premiums for all drivers including young drivers and professional drivers. Finally, it should be noted that the most recent CSO data (for July) indicates that motor insurance premiums have reduced by over 20% since their peak two years ago.

Banking Sector

115. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the steps that will be taken in response to the Central Bank's report on the culture in Irish banks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35888/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): On foot of the serious cultural failings in banks brought to light in the Tracker Mortgage Examination, I requested that the Central Bank undertake a review of the culture within the Irish retail banks, under Section 6A of Central Bank Act 1942, as amended.

The “Behaviour and Culture Report of the Irish Retail Banks Report” was published by the Central Bank in July 2018. The Report’s detailed analysis can make a positive contribution to changing the culture of the banking sector by enhancing individual accountability and also by ensuring responsibilities are effectively delegated to senior managers in banks.

Following on from the Report’s publication, the Central Bank is requiring banks to develop and produce individual action plans under Risk Mitigation Programmes. This involves banks setting out how they will respond to the issues raised in their individual Behaviour and Culture Reviews and how they will mitigate the risks identified. Similarly banks will be required to develop and produce to the Central Bank action plans setting out how they will respond to the issues raised in the Diversity and Inclusion Assessments.

The Government’s response to the legislative recommendations in the Report will be addressed through the forthcoming Central Bank (Amendment) Bill. Department officials met with Central Bank officials and work is now underway in both the Central Bank and the Department.

In addition, my officials will begin engagement with other relevant parties to address issues already raised in relation to this Bill, including Deputy Doherty, with regard to the provisions of the Private Member’s Bill put forward by him which is currently at Dáil Committee Stage.

NAMA Operations

116. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to use any eventual surplus from NAMA to help resolve the housing crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35892/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I wish to advise the Deputy that it is expected that NAMA will substantially complete its work by 2020. The Agency announced in October 2017 that it had redeemed all of its €30.2bn in Senior Debt which was guaranteed by the State and since April 2018 it has commenced the redemption of its €1.6bn in subordinated debt. However, notwithstanding the successful achievement of repaying the State’s contingent liability, three years ahead of schedule, there is still a significant body of work yet to be completed by NAMA.

Subject to current market conditions prevailing NAMA projects a surplus in the region of €3.5bn to be returned to the State once it completes its work. The realisation of this surplus depends on the redemption of NAMA’s remaining subordinated debt by March 2020 and completion of its Dublin Docklands SDZ and residential funding programmes.

As per section 60(2) of the NAMA Act 2009, NAMA may use surplus funds to redeem and cancel its senior and subordinated debt. Surplus funds may only be returned to the Central Fund once NAMA’s debt has been redeemed in full, which is expected to be in 2020.

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

In the meantime NAMA is making a significant contribution to the supply of housing within the State where it is in a position to do so. NAMA’s residential funding programme is expected to fund the completion of 20,000 residential units by the end of 2020. NAMA is on track to

meet this target with over 7,800 completed as of 21 August 2018. In addition, NAMA has an established policy of identifying to Local Authorities and approved housing bodies, properties within its portfolio which may be suitable for social housing. To date 6,984 such properties have been identified, with demand confirmed for 2,717 and 2,474 delivered or committed. Part of this delivery has been through NAMA's innovative National Asset Residential Property Services (NARPS) model, which has purchased nearly 1,300 properties from NAMA debtors and leased them on for social housing.

State Debt

117. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the impact on the debt to GDP ratio of a reduction of the debt by €2, €3 and €5 billion, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35893/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The nominal figures of €2 billion, €3 billion and €5 billion equate to 0.6 per cent of GDP, 1.0 per cent of GDP and 1.6 per cent of projected GDP for this year.

Accordingly, a reduction of €2 billion, €3 billion or €5 billion in nominal public indebtedness would reduce the gross general government debt to GDP ratio by approximately 0.6 percentage points, 1.0 percentage points or 1.6 percentage points respectively.

Modified GNI, or GNI*, is a more appropriate measure of debt sustainability for the Irish economy than GDP, as it excludes globalisation factors that disproportionality impact Irish GDP.

Accordingly, a reduction of €2 billion, €3 billion or €5 billion in nominal public indebtedness would reduce the gross general government debt to GNI* ratio by approximately 0.9 percentage points, 1.4 percentage points or 2.3 percentage points respectively.

Finally, I want to point out that in the Annual Report on Public Debt in Ireland 2018, published this month, my Department highlighted that public debt per capita in Ireland is one of the highest in the developed world, meaning that the economy is vulnerable to changes in the external economic situation.

This is why we need to balance the books and to put debt on a downward trajectory.

Real Estate Investment Trusts

118. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Finance if he or his departmental officials have met with a company (details supplied); the number of times he has met with the company; the dates of those meetings; the persons from his Department that were present at those meetings; the issues discussed at each meeting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35903/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am answering the question on the basis of my tenure as Minister for Finance only. I can confirm that neither I or my officials have met with Real Estate Investment Trust in question during this period.

Real Estate Investment Trusts

119. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Finance if he or his departmental officials have met with a company (details supplied); the number of times he has met the company; the dates of those meetings; the persons from his Department that were present at those meetings; the issues discussed at each meeting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35904/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am answering the question on the basis of my tenure as Minister for Finance only. I can confirm that neither I or my officials have met with Real Estate Investment Trust in question during this period.

Excise Duties

120. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance when excise tax (details supplied) will be reversed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35961/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, it is a longstanding practice of the Minister for Finance not to comment, in advance of the Budget, on any tax matters that might be the subject of Budget decisions.

VAT Rate Application

121. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding the VAT rate for the hospitality sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35972/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, it is a longstanding practice of the Minister for Finance not to comment, in advance of the Budget, on any tax matters that might be the subject of Budget decisions.

VAT Rate Application

122. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if it is possible to introduce a differentiated VAT rate within a single economic sector based on profitability or other measures such as turnover; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35979/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Fiscal neutrality is a fundamental tenet of the VAT system, and a core principle of EU tax law. As a result, any policy that goes against fiscal neutrality is counter to EU VAT law. In this regard, applying different VAT rates to different forms of the same service is illegal. For this reason it is not possible to apply different VAT rates to different services within the same sector based on profitability or other measures such as turnover.

VAT Rate Application

123. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance if the 9% tourism VAT rate will be retained in order to ensure the further recovery and growth of the hospitality sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36005/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, it is a

longstanding practice of the Minister for Finance not to comment, in advance of the Budget, on any tax matters that might be the subject of Budget decisions.

Tracker Mortgage Examination

124. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Finance if the issue of the 200 employees of a bank (details supplied) that have been excluded from its tracker mortgage examination will be raised at his meetings with the banks and financial institutions; if these borrowers can avail of staff tracker rates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36048/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy will be aware that, following my meetings with each of the banks last October, I stated publicly the Government's view that the banks' behaviour in relation to tracker mortgages was disgraceful and that the Government was determined to ensure that the matter was resolved. In addition, I conveyed the Government's full support for the Central Bank's actions to drive a resolution in the interests of consumers in the context of its Tracker Mortgage Examination.

At the same time, as part of follow-up actions, I announced that I had requested the Governor of the Central Bank to provide me with a progress report by mid-December on whether the banks had made acceptable and sufficient progress in line with commitments they had given to resolve the matter. I duly received such a report and, in my statement of 20th December last, noted that the Central Bank concluded that the banks had made sufficient progress in meeting the targets they agreed to in October. In addition, I received a second progress report in April which gives further assurance in this regard.

The Central Bank's work is ongoing with a view to completing its Tracker Mortgage Examination and, accordingly, it would not be appropriate for me to engage with any bank on an individual tracker related matter. The Central Bank has confirmed that a final report will be issued on completion of the Examination.

In relation the Deputy's question as to whether or not affected borrowers can avail of tracker rates, this is a matter for the bank to determine taking into a number of factors including the terms and conditions of the mortgage contract, current bank policy on staff lending, and the bank's existing suite of product offerings.

Mortgage Book Sales

125. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the recent sale by banks (details supplied) and other financial institutions of performing and non-performing loans to vulture funds; if these sales will be prevented; the advice offered to affected mortgage holders that are concerned in relation to same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36049/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy may be aware that in my role as Minister for Finance, I cannot stop loan sales even by the banks in which the State has a shareholding. These decisions are the responsibility of the board and management of the banks which must be run on an independent and commercial basis. The banks' independence is protected by Relationship Frameworks which are legally binding documents that I cannot change unilaterally. These frameworks, which are publicly available, were insisted upon by the European Commission to protect competition in the Irish market.

Despite the significant progress already made by the Irish banks in reducing NPLs, their ratios are still well above the European average of around 4%. PTSB is a particular outlier in this regard with a ratio of 25%, before the recently announced loan sale – Project Glas. Given this position, banking regulators have tasked each bank with developing and implementing strategies with the expectation that their ratios will be reduced towards the European average. Given the scale of reduction required, Project Glas was a necessary action taken by PTSB.

In relation to the position following a loan sale, I have commented on a number of occasions that the protections for borrowers are unchanged. All terms and conditions attached to their mortgage contract remain in place. In addition, Start Mortgages the purchaser of the PTSB loan book, is a retail credit firm regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland. When dealing with borrowers, retail credit firms are bound by the same regulations that currently apply to PTSB. Like PTSB, they are required to comply with the Consumer Protection Code (CPC) and the Code of Conduct for Mortgage Arrears (CCMA) when dealing with borrowers who are in arrears.

I should also highlight that regardless of the protections that are currently in place for mortgage holders, I have confirmed that I am prepared to engage with Deputies from other parties in an effort to see if these protections can be strengthened further in a sensible manner.

This commitment has been demonstrated recently by the Government's support for the Bill introduced by Deputy Michael McGrath, T.D., which seeks to regulate the purchasers of mortgage loans. In addition, earlier this year I asked the Central Bank to carry out a review of the CCMA to ensure it remains as effective as possible. I have asked for the report to be completed as soon as is practicable. The Central Bank has stated that it is their intention to deliver the report by the end of September 2018. If as a result of this review, the CCMA requires amendment, a full public consultation process would be required in line with normal guidelines.

Mortgage Book Sales

126. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance the discussions taking place with partially State owned banks regarding the sale of non-performing loans to vulture funds; the criteria being used to decide on the make-up of the portfolios; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36133/18]

130. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance the level of interaction he has with the CEOs of the various partially State owned banks and the non-performing loans of each; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36137/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 126 and 130 together.

In the first instance, I should highlight for the Deputy that in my role as Minister for Finance, I cannot stop loan sales even by the banks in which the State has a shareholding. Decisions in this regard, as well as the criteria used to decide the make-up of loans to be included, are the sole responsibility of the board and management of the banks which must be run on an independent and commercial basis. The banks' independence is protected by Relationship Frameworks which are legally binding documents that I cannot change unilaterally. These frameworks which are publicly available, were insisted upon by the European Commission to protect competition in the Irish market.

Despite the significant progress already made by the Irish banks in reducing NPLs, their ratios are still well above the European average of around 4%. PTSB is a particular outlier in this regard with a ratio of 25%, before the recently announced loan sale – Project Glas. Given

this position, banking regulators have tasked each bank with developing and implementing strategies with the expectation that their ratios will be reduced towards the European average. Given the sale of reduction required, it was inevitable though unfortunate, that Project Glas was a necessary action taken by PTSB.

Notwithstanding a loan sale, I wish to highlight that the protections for borrowers in place before the sale remain unchanged. In this regard, it is important to note that there are no changes to the rights of a borrower whose loan is sold by a bank. All terms and conditions attached to their mortgage contract remain in place. In addition, Start Mortgages, the purchaser of the PTSB loan book, is a retail credit firm regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland since 2008. When dealing with borrowers, retail credit firms are bound by the same regulations that currently apply to PTSB. Like PTSB, they are required to comply with the Consumer Protection Code (CPC) and the Code of Conduct for Mortgage Arrears (CCMA) when dealing with borrowers who are in arrears.

I should also highlight that regardless of the protections that are currently in place for mortgage holders, I am prepared to engage with Deputies from other parties in an effort to see if these protections can be strengthened further in a sensible manner. This commitment has been demonstrated recently by the Government's support for the Bill introduced by Deputy Michael McGrath, T.D., which seeks to regulate the purchasers of mortgage loans.

In addition, earlier this year I asked the Central Bank to carry out a review of the CCMA to ensure it remains as effective as possible. I have asked for the report to be completed as soon as is practicable. The Central Bank has stated that it is their intention to deliver the report by the end of September 2018. If as a result of this review, the CCMA requires amendment, a full public consultation process would be required in line with normal guidelines.

The interaction between both Department officials and myself and senior management of the banks in which the State has an investment takes place on a regular basis. As part of their ongoing engagement with the banks, Department officials meet with bank management during which a wide range of topics are discussed, including loan sales where relevant. Subsequent to these meetings, Department officials brief me as required. In addition to these meetings, I meet directly with the CEOs of each of the banks from time to time and loan sales would be included as an agenda item again where relevant.

Mortgage Book Sales

127. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the inclusion of split mortgages in bank sales of non-performing loans to vulture funds; his further views on the inclusion of mortgages of families that are engaging and meeting their arrears arrangements in bank sales of non-performing loans to vulture funds; the measures he is taking to protect these owner occupier mortgages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36134/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Since the establishment of the Single Supervisory Mechanism (SSM) in November 2014, the focus has shifted from reducing mortgage arrears levels to reducing Non-performing Loans (NPLs). This shift in focus has been accompanied by a new strict Europe-wide definition of what constitutes an NPL by the European Banking Authority (EBA), which means that certain restructures are deemed NPL even if customers are meeting the revised payment schedule.

Officials in my Department met with staff of the SSM at the highest level on two occasions since late 2016. I also met Ms Nouy, Chair of the Supervisory Board of the ECB. In the course

of these discussions, my officials outlined the background and history to the restructuring effort in Ireland and made the case against continuing to classify some types of restructured loans, including certain split mortgages, as NPLs. While we have been informed that the SSM is looking into the regulatory treatment of split mortgages across a number of European member states I have no evidence at this point that this categorisation is going to change.

Dealing specifically with Deputy Broughan's question about the inclusion of these split mortgages in bank sales, the Deputy will be aware that when PTSB first announced Project Glas - its planned sale of NPLs – back in February, the bank confirmed that loans which were restructured by way of a split mortgage were within the scope of the overall portfolio being considered for sale. However, the bank subsequently announced in May that it had withdrawn approximately €0.9bn of principal dwelling houses (PDHs) split mortgages from the sale where borrowers were meeting the terms agreed with the bank. The removal of these restructured loans from the sale was a positive outcome for the borrowers which I welcomed.

In terms of restructured loans that are performing being included in loan sales, most loan agreements include a clause that allows the original lender to sell the loan on to another firm. The Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing Firms) Act 2015 (“the 2015 Act”) was introduced to fill the consumer protection gap where loans are sold by the original lender to an unregulated firm. Under the 2015 Act, if the firm who bought loans from the original lender is an unregulated firm, then the loans must be serviced by a ‘credit servicing firm’ which is regulated by the Central Bank. Credit Servicing Firms are firms that manage or administer credit agreements such as mortgages or other loans on behalf of unregulated entities.

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

Provision 3.11 of the Central Bank's Consumer Protection Code 2012 (the Code) requires that, where a regulated lender intends to transfer all or part of its ‘regulated activities’ to another regulated entity, it must provide advance notification to both the Central Bank and affected consumers. Specifically, a lender must provide a consumer with at least 2 months’ notice before transferring all or part of its loan book covered by the Code to another person, including where the transferee is an unregulated entity. Where the transferee is an unregulated entity, the Code requires that the regulated lender also notify the consumer of the name of the regulated entity that will be ‘servicing’ the loan for the unregulated entity. In the event that there is a change in the credit servicing firm, the existing credit servicing firm must also notify the Central Bank and the consumer in advance, in accordance with the timelines set out under Provision 3.11 of the Code. Furthermore, I understand that the Central Bank expects all affected consumers to be informed of the term of their loan agreement which allows the loan to be sold and the identity and address of the new owner.

The Deputy will be aware that a Private Member's Bill now titled the Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing Firms) Bill 2018 was considered by Select committee on 12 July. My officials worked with Deputy McGrath and other stakeholders to develop the Bill as initiated. This Bill will require that loan owners are regulated by the Central Bank. I expect that Report Stage will be taken after the summer recess.

I have also asked the Central Bank to carry out a review of the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears (CCMA) to ensure it remains effective and for the review to be completed as soon

as possible.

Ensuring that the interests of consumers of financial services are protected is a key priority for the Government and the Central Bank.

Mortgage Book Sales

128. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance if he has requested a report on the number of owner occupier mortgages of a bank (details supplied) that were included in a project in cases in which mortgage holders have been engaging with the bank and meeting the arrangements for repayments and arrears; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36135/18]

129. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance the number of non-owner occupier mortgages that are accommodating tenants in the private rented sector that have been sold by a bank (details supplied) to a company; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36136/18]

131. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance the number of non-owner occupier mortgages being sold by a bank (details supplied) that are accommodating tenants in the private rented sector and are in receipt of HAP, RS and RAS payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36138/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 128, 129 and 131 together.

As the Deputy will be aware the decisions around loan sales are the responsibility of the board and management of the banks which must be run on an independent and commercial basis. The Minister for Finance cannot stop loan sales, even by the banks in which the State has a shareholding.

I wish to advise the Deputy that while my department has had a number of interactions with PTSB in connection with the sale, it does not hold the specific information that is being sought. Officials from my department contacted PTSB and they provided the following response:

“Permanent TSB plc (the ‘Bank’) has agreed to sell a Non-Performing Loan portfolio to the retail credit firm Start Mortgages DAC, supported by LSF Irish Holdings 97 DAC, both affiliates of the Lone Star Funds. Start Mortgages has been authorised by the Central Bank of Ireland since November 2008 and will become the servicer of the loans when the transaction completes later this year.

The loan sale was undertaken as part of the Bank’s strategy to reduce the ratio of Non-Performing Loans on the Bank’s balance sheet from c.26% in line with regulatory requirements.

The portfolio contains loans linked to c.10,700 properties. In terms of the make-up of the portfolio by loan type (Variable, Fixed, Tracker), the book broadly reflects the make-up of the Bank’s overall loan book.

The loan sale includes circa 3,300 Buy-To-Let (BTL) properties which are classified as Non-Performing reflecting the Non-Performing Classification guidelines set out by European and Local Regulators. Comprehensive occupancy information on this BTL population is not available.

All loans included in the sale are either Non-Performing or are cross-collateralised/con-

nected to another loan which is Non-Performing, reflecting the Non-Performing Classification guidelines set out by European and Local Regulators. Customers will continue to be afforded the protection of existing regulatory protections after the transfer completes.”

Question No. 130 answered with Question No. 126.

Question No. 131 answered with Question No. 128.

Mortgage Data

132. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of mortgages set to be sold by a bank (details supplied) as part of a project; the number of loans that are standard, variable, fixed rate and tracker mortgages; the number in each category that are performing; the number in each category that are adhering to the restructuring arrangement in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36145/18]

140. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the number of loans sold by a bank (details supplied) to companies that were categorised as tracker mortgage products; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36324/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 132 and 140 together.

As the Deputy will be aware the decisions around loan sales are the responsibility of the board and management of the banks which must be run on an independent and commercial basis. The Minister for Finance cannot stop loan sales, even by the banks in which the State has a shareholding.

I wish to advise the Deputy that my department does not hold the information that is being sought. Officials from my department contacted PTSB and it provided the following response:

“Permanent TSB plc (the ‘Bank’) has agreed to sell a Non-Performing Loan portfolio to the retail credit firm Start Mortgages DAC, supported by LSF Irish Holdings 97 DAC, both affiliates of the Lone Star Funds. Start Mortgages has been authorised by the Central Bank of Ireland since November 2008 and will become the servicer of the loans when the transaction completes later this year.

The loan sale was undertaken as part of the Bank’s strategy to reduce the ratio of Non-Performing Loans on the Bank’s balance sheet from c.26% in line with regulatory requirements.

The portfolio contains loans linked to c.10,700 properties. In terms of the make-up of the portfolio by loan type (Variable, Fixed, Tracker), the book broadly reflects the make-up of the Bank’s overall loan book.

All loans included in the sale are either Non-Performing or are cross-collateralised/connected to another loan which is Non-Performing, reflecting the Non-Performing Classification guidelines set out by European and Local Regulators.

Customers will continue to be afforded the protection of existing regulatory protections after the transfer completes.”

Departmental Correspondence

133. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to issues raised in correspondence by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36172/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I can confirm for the Deputy that the matter referred to has been drawn to my attention and a response has now been issued.

Revenue Commissioners Investigations

134. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Finance if the case of a person (details supplied) who was an employee of ESB and received a settlement from it in 2009 will be investigated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36184/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Revenue has advised me that a review of the case in question is already under way and will be concluded as quickly as possible.

Once the review is completed Revenue will make direct contact with the person setting out the correct tax position. Revenue has assured me that any refund due to the person arising from the review will be immediately processed.

Vehicle Registration

135. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Finance the reason the Revenue Commissioners valued a second-hand vehicle purchased by a person (details supplied) for €4,000 at €16,719 and applied VRT of €5,979; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36185/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the difficulty in the case to which the Deputy is referring arose because the person in question incorrectly informed Revenue that the vehicle had been converted from a goods vehicle to a passenger vehicle thereby generating a liability to Vehicle Registration Tax (VRT).

Revenue subsequently made direct contact with the person who confirmed that his concerns related to motor tax and the incorrect classification of the vehicle. He also confirmed that no vehicle conversion had taken place. On foot of these clarifications, Revenue confirmed to the person that there was no VRT due, and no payment was made.

Flood Risk Insurance Cover Provision

136. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Finance the reason areas (details supplied) are being charged flood insurance premiums for parts of the area in question that have never flooded. [36189/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): At the outset you should be aware that the provision of insurance is a commercial matter for insurance companies, which has to be based on a proper assessment of the risks they are willing to accept. This assessment will in many cases include insurers own presumptions based on their private modelling and research. Consequently, neither the Government nor the Central Bank can interfere in the provision or pricing of insurance products or have the power to direct insurance companies to provide flood

cover to specific individuals or businesses. This position is reinforced by the EU framework for insurance which expressly prohibits Member States from doing so. Therefore I am not in a position to give a reason as to why an extra flood premium charge is being applied to the area in question, but I do understand that flood defences are being improved in that region and could in time have a positive impact on premiums in the future.

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

VAT Rate Reductions

137. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of VAT foregone by the Revenue Commissioners at the 9% rate for each year and to date in 2018 since the rate was introduced; the amount collected in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36196/18]

157. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of revenue foregone each year by maintaining the 9% VAT rate for the hospitality sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36592/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 137 and 157 together.

I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that information provided on VAT3 returns (the primary return filed by VAT traders) does not require a trader to separately identify the yield from specific rates. Based on Revenue data and other third-party data sources, a tentative estimate of the VAT foregone for all goods and services supplied at the second reduced rate of 9% from 2011 to 2017 is provided in the table (an estimate for 2018 to date is not presently available).

Year	VAT Foregone
2011	€150m
2012	€315m
2013	€355m
2014	€375m
2015	€420m
2016	€460m
2017	€490m

As additional information becomes available, these estimates may be subject to revision.

Social and Affordable Housing Funding

138. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Finance the status of work with the credit unions and the approved housing bodies on the establishment of a special purpose vehicle to facilitate the delivery of social housing. [36300/18]

187. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the work his Department has carried out with the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government and the Central Bank regarding the establishment of a funding vehicle for credit unions to invest in social housing provision as committed to by the government under Rebuilding Ireland; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that such a funding vehicle will have to be regulated by the Central Bank and that the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government may require assistance if ensuring such a funding vehicle for social housing is compatible with CBI regulations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36960/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 138 and 187 together.

As the Deputy is aware, the Programme for a Partnership Government recognises the potential role that credit unions can play in housing finance.

To that end, officials from my Department and the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government have met with the credit union representative bodies on a number of occasions to examine how credit unions can assist in the area of social housing.

Following engagement with the credit union sector on proposals for credit unions to provide funding for the provision of social housing, the Central Bank undertook a review of the investment framework for credit unions in 2017. On foot of this review, revised Regulations with the addition of investment in Tier 3 Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) as a permitted investment class for credit unions commenced on 1 March 2018. Since this date, credit unions are permitted to provide funding to Tier 3 AHBs for the provision of social housing.

This new investment framework for credit unions clarifies the scope and the manner in which credit unions can support the development of social housing. The Regulations require that investments by credit unions in Tier 3 AHBs must be made through a regulated investment vehicle. The maximum permitted investment amount per credit union is 50% of a credit unions regulatory reserves where a credit union has total assets of at least €100 million and 25% of a credit unions regulatory reserves for all other credit unions. These limits may facilitate a combined sector investment in Tier 3 AHBs of close to €700 million.

In line with the commitments in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government established an Innovation Fund to assist AHBs to develop structures, policies and new funding mechanisms. One of the projects being funded, which is being undertaken by the Irish Council for Social Housing (ICSH), is the development of a Special Purpose Vehicle to facilitate investment into the AHB sector by investors, including the Credit Union movement. The project was approved in May last year and is being undertaken by the ICSH in three phases. The first two phases have been completed and work on the third phase is ongoing.

With respect to any funding mechanisms specific to the Credit Union sector for investing in social housing, ultimately this will have to be put in place in the first instance by the credit unions themselves, with the support of their members, and with the approval of the Central Bank. In this regard it would not be appropriate for me to comment on the status of any regulated investment vehicle which the credit union sector is or could be developing to invest in Tier 3 AHBs.

Tax Code

139. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the financial or other incen-

tives that exist for the construction and delivery of commercial development. [36317/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The payment of financial incentives for construction purposes is not within the remit of my Department. However, there are a number of tax based measures which are relevant to the Deputy's question.

Industrial Buildings Allowances – General Scheme

Industrial Buildings allowances are available for capital expenditure incurred on the construction or refurbishment of various types of industrial buildings in use for the purposes of a trade, such as mills or factories, hotels, laboratories in use for the analysis of minerals and dock undertakings. Expenditure incurred is written off at a rate of 4% per annum over 25 years. In the case of other trades such as market gardening and the intensive production of cattle, sheep, pigs, poultry or eggs, the rate of write-off is accelerated (10% per annum over 10 years). The qualifying period for incurring capital expenditure which would qualify for an accelerated allowance has terminated in relation to the trade of hotel-keeping and the operation and management of a registered nursing home amongst others. However, expenditure incurred may still be written-off at a rate of 10% over 10 years or 15% over years 1-6 and 10% in year 7 in some cases depending on when the asset was first brought into use.

Industrial Buildings Allowances – Living City Initiative

The Living City Initiative is a scheme of property tax incentives aimed at the regeneration of certain areas (known as “special regeneration areas”) in the historic centres of Cork, Dublin, Galway, Kilkenny, Limerick and Waterford. The scheme was launched in May 2015 and provides for tax relief for qualifying expenditure incurred on the refurbishment and conversion of both residential and commercial buildings. In relation to commercial buildings, expenditure is written off at rate of 15% per annum over 6 years and 10% in year 7. Relief is only available for refurbishment or conversion work (not for “new build”) that is carried out during the qualifying period which runs from 5 May 2015 to 4 May 2020 for the commercial element. To conform to EU State Aid de minimis guidelines, a cap is imposed on the amount of capital expenditure that can qualify for relief at the accelerated rate provided for under the scheme.

Property developers or connected persons are precluded from obtaining relief under the commercial element of the scheme where either the property developer or the connected person incurred the capital expenditure on the refurbishment or conversion of the premises or it was incurred by some other person connected with the property developer. The restriction on the offset of unused current year capital allowances against other income of €31,750 applies to individual passive investors (investors who are not actively engaged in the business). Additionally, in the case of passive investors, any unused capital allowances under this scheme which are carried forward beyond the tax life (the period within which the allowances can be transferred to a subsequent owner) of the building to which they relate, are immediately lost. The property relief surcharge may apply to certain claimants under the commercial element of the scheme and relief is not available for any part of expenditure consisting of grants from the State or other State bodies.

Industrial Buildings Allowances – Aviation Services Facilities

Finance Act 2013 introduced a scheme of accelerated capital allowances for the construction and refurbishment of certain specialist buildings and structures for use in the maintenance, repair or overhaul of commercial aircraft. The relief applies to buildings or structures in use for the purposes of such operations at all airports within the State. Relief for capital expenditure incurred is given via industrial buildings allowances at a rate of 15% per annum over 6 years and 10% in year 7. To qualify for relief under the scheme capital expenditure must be incurred

during the qualifying period which runs from 13 October 2015 to 12 October 2020. To conform to EU State Aid de minimis guidelines, a cap is imposed on the amount of capital expenditure that can qualify for relief at the accelerated rate provided for under the scheme. Additionally, capital expenditure which is not specified capital expenditure can qualify for capital allowances at the standard rate of 4% per annum over 25 years providing it is incurred on or after 13 October 2015.

Capital expenditure will not be regarded as specified capital expenditure for the purposes of claiming accelerated allowances under the aviation services facilities scheme where the relevant interest is held by a property developer or a person connected with a property developer and the capital expenditure on the construction or refurbishment is incurred by either of those persons or by some other person connected with the property developer. The restriction on the offset of unused current year capital allowances against other income of €31,750 applies to individual passive investors (investors who are not actively engaged in the business). Additionally, in the case of passive investors, any unused capital allowances under this scheme which are carried forward beyond the tax life (the period within which the allowances can be transferred to a subsequent owner) of the building to which they relate, are immediately lost. The property relief surcharge may apply to certain claimants under the scheme and relief is not available for any part of expenditure consisting of grants from the State or other State bodies. However, where such grant assistance has been received the capital expenditure may still qualify for capital allowances at the standard rate of 4% per annum net of any grants.

Industrial Buildings Allowances – Area Based Property Incentive Schemes

These schemes are now terminated i.e the periods during which qualifying expenditure could be incurred to avail of industrial buildings allowances under the schemes have expired. However, allowances may continue to be written off in some cases.

Question No. 140 answered with Question No. 132.

Mortgage Book Sales

141. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the way in which or the scenarios in which he may intervene in the sale of a portfolio (details supplied) to a company; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36325/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, the Minister for Finance cannot stop loan sales, even by the banks in which the State has a shareholding. These decisions are the responsibility of the board and management of the banks which must be run on an independent and commercial basis. The banks' independence is protected by Relationship Frameworks which are legally binding documents which I, as Minister, cannot change unilaterally. These frameworks, which are publicly available, were insisted upon by the European Commission to protect competition in the Irish market.

The PTSB Relationship Framework can be found at the following link:

<http://www.finance.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/PTSB-Relationship-Framework-April-2015.pdf>

Although the PTSB loan sale was necessary, I wish to highlight that I have commented on a number of occasions that the protections for borrowers in place before the sale remain unchanged. In this regard, it is important to note that there are no changes to the rights of a borrower whose loan is sold by a bank. All terms and conditions attached to their mortgage contract

remain in place. In addition, Start Mortgages, the purchaser of the PTSB loan book, is a retail credit firm regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland since 2008.

When dealing with borrowers, retail credit firms are bound by the same regulations that currently apply to PTSB. Like PTSB, they are required to comply with the Consumer Protection Code (CPC) and the Code of Conduct for Mortgage Arrears (CCMA) when dealing with borrowers who are in arrears

I should also highlight that regardless of the protections that are currently in place for mortgage holders, I have confirmed that I am prepared to engage with Deputies from other parties in an effort to see if these protections can be strengthened further in a sensible manner. This commitment has been demonstrated recently by the Government's support for the Bill introduced by Deputy Michael McGrath, T.D., which seeks to regulate the purchasers of mortgage loans.

In addition, earlier this year I asked the Central Bank to carry out a review of the CCMA to ensure it remains as effective as possible. I have asked for the report to be completed as soon as is practicable. The Central Bank has stated that it is their intention to deliver the report by the end of September 2018. If as a result of this review, the CCMA requires amendment, a full public consultation process would be required in line with normal guidelines.

Question No. 142 answered with Question No. 107.

Tracker Mortgages

143. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the practice of banks removing persons from tracker mortgages that are in arrears; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36331/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Central Bank has strong consumer protection requirements covering tracker rate mortgages which are set out in the statutory the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears (2010 and 2013) and Consumer Protection Codes (2006 and 2012).

In the case of tracker mortgages on a primary residence in financial difficulty, such borrowers are covered by the protections of the CCMA. For the purposes of the CCMA, 'primary residence' means a property which is the residential property which the borrower occupies as his/her primary residence in the State, or a residential property which is the only residential property in the State owned by the borrower. Therefore, the protections of the CCMA only apply to buy-to-let mortgages if the residential property is the only residential property in the State owned by the borrower.

Provision 41 on the CCMA provides that the lender must not require the **borrower** to change from an existing tracker mortgage to another mortgage type, as part of any alternative repayment arrangement offered to the **borrower**, except in the circumstances set out in Provision 46. (Please see attached link: <https://www.centralbank.ie/docs/default-source/Regulation/consumer-protection/other-codes-of-conduct/24-gns-4-2-7-2013-ccma.pdf?sfvrsn=4>)

Provision 46 provides that, in the case of an existing tracker mortgage, if following consideration of the options in accordance with Provision 39, in conjunction with Provision 41, the lender concludes that none of the option(s) that would allow the borrower to retain his/her tracker interest rate is/are appropriate and sustainable for the borrower's individual circumstances, the lender may, but only as a last resort, offer the borrower an alternative repayment arrangement which requires the borrower to change from an existing tracker mortgage to

another mortgage type, if that alternative repayment arrangement:

- a) is affordable for the borrower, and
- b) is a long-term sustainable solution which is consistent with Central Bank of Ireland policy on sustainability.

For mortgages in arrears that do not fall within the scope of the CCMA, (e.g. buy-to-let properties which are not the only residential property in the State owned by the borrower), the provisions of the Consumer Protection Code 2012 (the Code) apply.

Under the Code there are clear obligations on lenders to act in the best interests of customers, to disclose relevant material information to customers and/or to bring key items or key information to the attention of customers. Further, the Code sets out specific requirements in respect of the treatment of personal customers exiting tracker rate mortgages. (Chapter 6 Provision 6.9 – 6.11 of the 2012 Code: <https://www.centralbank.ie/docs/default-source/regulation/industry-market-sectors/brokers-retail-intermediaries/supervision-process/consumer-protection-code-2012.pdf?sfvrsn=4>).

With respect to arrears resolution, the Code requires a lender to seek to agree an approach that will assist the personal consumer in resolving the arrears. However, it does not specifically prevent a lender from removing or amending a tracker rate on a buy-to-let mortgage in arrears.

As Minister for Finance I have not been made aware of any specific examples of the practice the Deputy refers to. If the Deputy is aware of such instances of banks removing persons that are in mortgage arrears from their tracker mortgage that are in breach of either the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears or the Consumer Protection Code 2012 then I would urge the Deputy to bring this information to the attention of the Central Bank.

The Deputy may also wish to note that the Central Bank's Tracker Mortgage Examination requires all lenders, which offered tracker interest rate mortgages to their customers, to review all mortgage accounts, including accounts in arrears, to identify any tracker related failings both from a contractual and transparency perspective.

The Central Bank provided a comprehensive update on the Tracker Mortgage Examination in April 2018, which is available at: <https://www.centralbank.ie/docs/default-source/consumer-hub-library/tracker-issues/update-on-tracker-mortgage-examination---april-2018.pdf?sfvrsn=4>.

Budget 2018

144. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance if an assessment of the impact of the Budget 2018 capital gains tax changes to tackle land-hoarding has been conducted; the way in which the effectiveness of these changes has been determined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36359/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Budget 2018 and Finance Act 2017 provided for changes to the Section 604A CGT relief which was intended to allow owners of qualifying land or buildings the option of selling those assets after the fourth anniversary of their acquisition and enjoy a full relief from CGT. It remains open of course for individuals to retain ownership of such land or buildings up to and beyond the 7 year qualifying period.

To the extent that any disposals may have occurred as a result of this change to the relief

they would only have commenced on 1 January 2018. The filing of returns are required by 31 October in the year after the date of disposal. In the case of disposals made in 2018 returns therefore would be due to be filed by 31 October 2019.

It is therefore not possible at this stage to determine the impact of the Finance Bill 2017 change in the section 604A CGT relief in the absence of appropriate data.

Ireland Strategic Investment Fund Investments

145. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the action ISIF is taking to boost the supply of affordable housing here; the definition of affordable housing it is working to in this regard; his plans to change the remit of ISIF to give it a much clearer responsibility for the supply of affordable housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36362/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am informed by the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF) that it is making a very substantial contribution to new private housing supply generally which is critical in terms of meeting the pent-up demand for housing across all sectors of the market.

In line with its double bottom line mandate, ISIF has already invested and approved over €726 million in a number of significant financing platforms and projects in the construction sector, covering both the 'Build to Sell' and 'Build to Rent' space. This represents one of the largest investment commitments by ISIF in any sector, alongside more than €850m of external co-investment capital. These investments are, in all cases, focused on new housing supply and therefore on making much needed additional supply available to purchase and rent. Collectively, ISIF's investments are expected to support the supply of 15,000 new homes by 2021, with to date specific funding commitments made by ISIF platforms for over 3,500 residential units. All such housing projects financed by ISIF capital include, in line with the wider market, an element of both Part V housing and, in the case of rental properties, Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) tenancies.

As the Deputy is no doubt aware, ISIF is required by legislation to ensure that all of its investments meet both commercial criteria and are off-balance sheet from the Exchequer perspective. In that context, investment in social housing supply is particularly challenging, although ISIF continues to engage intensively with the market to examine the potential for social housing investment that is both commercial and off-balance sheet.

ISIF's contribution therefore, in line with its mandate, is focused particularly on helping to overcome barriers to new housing supply, particularly through the provision of equity for investments that may not otherwise happen, and in this way is helping, as part of a wider range of Government policies and actions, to narrow the gap between housing supply and housing demand which is at the heart of both access and affordability issues.

On July 4th 2018, following extensive review, the Government decided to refocus ISIF funds on the priorities that will support Project Ireland 2040 and have a more direct and positive impact on the economy's long-term growth potential. Housing supply is one of the identified priorities. The reallocations of ISIF funds requires the passage of legislation, including the legislation establishing Home Building Finance Ireland for which €750 million of the original ISIF fund has been earmarked. On foot of the recent Government Decision, I will soon be writing to the Chief Executive of the NTMA to request that ISIF prepare the necessary proposals to operationalise the decision for my consideration. My officials have already held discussions with ISIF so as to allow it to begin preparatory work on the refocused investment strategy.

Tax Code

146. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if the Revenue Commissioners request details of foreign PPS numbers, for example, an Australian tax number, from persons who have worked abroad for the landlord's tax refund of HAP payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36368/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that, in general, where loans are used to purchase, improve or repair rented residential premises, section 97(2J) of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (TCA 1997) operates to impose restrictions on the amount of loan interest accruing between 7 April 2009 and 31 December 2020 that qualifies as a deduction against rental income. However, in accordance with section 97(2K) TCA 1997, those restrictions do not apply where in the period from 1 January 2016 to 31 December 2019, a landlord rents residential premises for a period of 3 years to a tenant who is in receipt of certain social housing supports. In such a case, when computing taxable rents from the property in question, the landlord may deduct the full amount of loan interest accruing in that 3-year period in respect of money borrowed to purchase, improve or repair that property.

In effect, the amount of the interest accrued in each year of the 3-year period is rolled-up and treated as accruing on the day after the 3-year period ends. Relief for this rolled-up interest is then obtained by way of a claim to Revenue after the end of the period. Revenue advise me that the interest deduction is claimed on the landlord's tax return. If the individual is non-resident for the year of assessment, the tax return requires details of the foreign tax identification number to be provided.

Revenue further advise me that to qualify for relief under section 97(2K) TCA 1997, the landlord must submit a Declaration of Undertaking Form to the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB). The undertaking commits the landlord to letting the relevant property to a qualifying tenant for the 3-year period and must be submitted at the same time as the tenancy is required to be registered in accordance with section 134 of the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 (i.e. within 1 month of the start of the tenancy).

Tax Collection

147. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the extra costs incurred by self-employed persons who have to operate the E relevant contracts tax and almost in all cases need to employ an accountant to deal with these issues whereas under the previous system many self-employed persons could operate the system on their own without the cost of having to pay accountants in most cases a minimum of €1,000 per annum out of their self-employed income; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36377/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that Relevant Contracts Tax (RCT) is a withholding tax mechanism designed to improve tax compliance in certain industry sectors that were historically identified as presenting compliance risks, namely the construction, meat processing and forestry sectors. It operates in a similar manner to other withholding taxes including those in place in respect of share dividends and certain professional services.

A paper based withholding system was in place until 1 January 2012, when the electronic RCT (eRCT) system was introduced. The electronic system streamlined the administration of RCT, reduced the opportunity for fraud, improved the cash-flow position of compliant subcontractors and significantly reduced the compliance burden for persons operating the tax. For

example, eRCT eliminates more than 1 million paper returns annually, reducing the cost of compliance to business by an estimated €85 million. In addition, Revenue uses the data collected through the eRCT system to pre-populate annual tax return forms thereby further assisting taxpayers to meet their obligations while also reducing compliance costs.

Revenue has assured me that the eRCT system is a flexible, user-friendly tool that can easily link in with other software packages that Principal Contractors can use to manage their own financial affairs as well as fulfil their RCT obligations. Revenue has also confirmed that the eRCT system is supported by extensive published guidance and it should not be necessary for taxpayers to engage a tax agent to operate it.

Departmental Communications

148. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance the positions in his Department and the organisations under its aegis that have arrangements in place for lo-call numbers or 1800, 1850 and 1890 telephone numbers for members of the public to contact his Department or organisations under its aegis; the number of these that are completely free to call for persons who use mobile telephones and may incur major bills telephoning such organisations; if the situation will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36399/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In response to the Deputy, I can confirm that an 1890 lo-call phone number, in addition to a landline phone number, is available for members of the public to contact my Department. These numbers are available on the *www.finance.gov.ie* website.

The 1890 number provided will incur a cost to persons calling my Department using a mobile phone, the cost of which is dependent and determined by the mobile operator used. A review is underway to examine ways of reducing costs incurred by members of the public when contacting my Department, with consideration given to possible alternatives to the 1890 service.

I am informed that 13 of the 17 bodies under the aegis of my Department do not have arrangements in place for lo-call numbers or 1800, 1850 and 1890 phone numbers for members of the public to contact them. A number of these 13 bodies are not public facing, and as such, do not in general have dealings with the public. They include the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation which is in liquidation, the Credit Union Advisory Committee which is a committee that advises the Minister for Finance on credit Union matters and meets regularly in my Department's offices, the Credit Union Restructuring Board which has completed its remit and is awaiting legislation to wind-down, and the Social Finance Foundation which is a wholesale lender of social finance. The remaining 9 bodies are the Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal, the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General, the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman, the Investor Compensation Company DAC, the Irish Financial Services Appeals Tribunal, the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council, the National Asset Management Agency, the National Treasury Management Agency and the Tax Appeals Commission. These Bodies have indicated that they currently have no plans to review these arrangements.

Four of the bodies under my Department's aegis have arrangements in place for lo-call numbers or 1800, 1850 and 1890 phone numbers. They are the Central Bank of Ireland, the Credit Review Office, the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland and Office of the Revenue Commissioners.

The Central Bank of Ireland has 1890 phone numbers in place for members of the public for

general enquiries, queries on online regulatory returns by firms, the making of protected disclosures and to purchase collector coins. The Central Bank indicates that the charge attached to calling their 1890 numbers is dependent on the mobile phone provider, specifically in the case of those using pre-pay bundles. In order to offer callers a choice, it also has Dublin landline numbers for each of these purposes. It intends to continue to provide a choice of numbers.

The Credit Review Office has an 1850 flat rate number in place that operates at a maximum cost (of 31c) per call. They have no plans to review this at present.

The Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland has an 1800 Freephone number which is a helpline for the Brexit Loan Scheme.

As well as twenty eight 1890 numbers in place, the Office of the Revenue Commissioners has an 1800 Freephone number for the reporting of drug and tobacco smuggling. It has been actively seeking ways to reduce the telephone cost burden for customers, including exploring alternatives to the 1890 service. This included evaluating new telephony technology which could provide a robust, reliable and scalable telephone service (Revenue received approx. 2.5m calls per year) without relying on 1890 architecture. Revenue is now in a position to begin rolling out new technology for its telephone service by the end of 2018/early 2019 using 'Session Initiation Protocol (SIP)' based telephony. This will allow a move away from using the 1890 infrastructure to standard landline numbers for all its services.

Departmental Staff Recruitment

149. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost of the recruitment of 15 additional international tax specialists at principal officer level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36419/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I wish to inform the Deputy that the Management of the Department of Finance is not confined to the Executive Board only. The Senior Management Group (the Executive Board, Principal Officer and equivalent grades) is central to consistency in governance, leadership and management of the Department.

Responsibility of Head of Business Unit is assigned to officers at Principal level or equivalent. These responsibilities sit within the overall management framework for the Civil Service and the Department. Their role includes management of department/division, management of resources, management of unit business and management of policy advice and implementation.

In terms of the estimated cost of recruiting additional officers at Principal Officer Higher grade the annual salary scales are as follows:

Principal Higher Non PPC: €86,817.00 - €90,293.00 - €93,782.00 - €97,258.00 - €100,228.00

Principal Higher PPC: €91,259.00 - €94,912.00 - €98,583.00 - €102,246.00 - €105,370.00.

Each point on the scale equates to incremental progression. It should be noted that these figures do not include the additional costs associated with their employment such as Employer's PRSI and the provision of necessary resources associated with their employment.

Commencement of Legislation

150. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance when section 28 of

the Finance Act 2016 will come into effect; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36423/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Section 28, Finance Act, 2016 amended section 598(3A) of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 which grants relief from capital gains tax in respect of compensation which has been received by a person under the scheme of compensation in respect of the decommissioning of fishing vessels implemented by the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine. As part of the policy to encourage decommissioning of such vessels, this extended the terms of CGT retirement relief for those receiving such compensation under the scheme and lengthened the time over which recipients of such relief could pay balancing charges for capital allowances on vessels. At the time of the passing of the Act, the introduction of the relief was subject to a commencement order to be signed by the Minister for Finance with the consent of the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

I understand that Ireland's European Maritime and Fisheries Fund Operational Programme 2014-20 provided for the implementation of a scheme to incentivise the permanent decommissioning of fishing vessels in certain imbalanced fleet segments. An Bord Iascaigh Mhara commissioned consultants to carry out a cost benefit analysis study of the proposed scheme. The consultants concluded that while the proposal could have a positive return, they recommended against a decommissioning scheme proceeding, as they considered that there was a significant risk that the benefits of the scheme would be eroded by use of the decommissioning premiums to fund re-entry to the fleet using off-register fleet capacity. The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine sought solutions to this issue with representatives of the fishing industry, but no legally robust solutions were identified. I understand that there was also a number of legal and State Aid obstacles to resolving the off-register obstacle.

As a result I believe that the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine concluded that a decommissioning scheme could not proceed. Under the EMFF Regulation, Permanent Cessation schemes were no longer permitted after 31 December, 2017. On that basis, and as no scheme will now be introduced, it is not intended that section 28 Finance Act, 2016 will now be commenced.

Questions Nos. 151 and 152 answered with Question No. 92.

VAT Rate Application

153. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Finance if the 9% VAT rate for the hotel sector will be maintained in budget 2019, which would bring Ireland in line with tourism VAT rates in other competing European countries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36492/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, it is a longstanding practice of the Minister for Finance not to comment, in advance of the Budget, on any tax matters that might be the subject of Budget decisions.

Property Tax

154. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Finance the status of the review of the local property tax announced earlier in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36539/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My Department is currently finalising the review of the LPT in conjunction with the Departments of Public Expenditure and Reform, Housing, Planning and Local Government, the Taoiseach and the Revenue Commissioners.

Tax Code

155. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Finance if the 2009 cap which applied to banks that had transferred assets to NAMA restricting their use of deferred tax assets to 50% of their corporation tax, which was removed in 2014, will be reintroduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36540/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Section 396C of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 previously restricted the amount of losses, as incurred by a NAMA participating institution from its trading operations in prior years, which could be set off against trading profits in the current year. The relief was limited to a maximum of 50% of the trading profits for each accounting period. This restriction was removed in Finance Bill 2013 as it was considered to have outlasted its initial purpose. Due to the substantial holdings that the State had subsequently acquired in the banking sector (99.8% of AIB and 15% of Bank of Ireland at the time) it was deemed to be acting against the State's interests. Section 396C was repealed to reduce the State's role as a 'backstop' provider of capital and to improve the existing value of the State's equity and debt investments.

Notwithstanding the losses carried forward it should be noted that the Irish banks do currently pay some Irish corporation tax, as the losses do not shelter profits made in all their corporate entities in Ireland. The banks are also contributing to the Exchequer through the financial institutions levy. To recognise the part that the banks played in the financial crisis, in 2013, the Government decided that the banking sector should make an annual contribution of approximately €150 million to the Exchequer for the period from 2014 to 2016. In Budget 2016, the payment of this levy was extended until 2021. The bank levy is expected to raise €750 million over those five years.

At Committee Stage of Finance Act 2017, I agreed that my officials would produce a report on the potential effect of limiting the provision of tax relief for losses carried forward for banks. This report has recently been provided to the Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach. The paper examines the potential re-introduction of the tax loss restriction for the NAMA-participating banks, among other options, and estimates that such a measure could potentially result in an annual Exchequer yield of approximately €111 million in respect of the remaining NAMA-participating banks, assuming no change to the bank levy.

The report also notes that a range of consequential impacts would have to be considered in connection with such a measure. A restriction targeted at some or all banks in Ireland could be expected to increase costs and/or reduce competition in the sector. This could have negative knock-on effects to the detriment of consumers, including mortgage holders, business borrowers and savers.

Such a change would have an impact on the capital position of the banks in which the State has a shareholding and the report estimates that an immediate reduction in value of the State's shareholdings of in excess of €400 million could be expected to occur. It would also have the potential to damage the State's credibility in the international markets, and this could have negative consequences for values achieved in future share sales.

These factors would need to be considered carefully in framing future policy with regard to

relief for trading losses in the banking sector.

Budget 2019

156. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance his plans for an increase in excise duty in budget 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36547/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, it is a longstanding practice of the Minister for Finance not to comment, in advance of the Budget, on any tax matters that might be the subject of Budget decisions.

Question No. 157 answered with Question No. 137.

Stamp Duty

158. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance the amount that would be raised annually by increasing the rate of stamp duty to 6%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36593/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The current rate of Stamp Duty on residential property is 1% on first €1 million of consideration and 2% on any excess. The current rate on non-residential property is 6% on the full consideration. It is therefore assumed that the Deputy is referring to residential property in his Question.

I am advised by Revenue that a Ready Reckoner is available on the Revenue Statistics webpage at:

<https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/ready-reckoner/index.aspx>.

This Ready Reckoner shows a wide range of detailed information, including changes to the Stamp Duty rate on residential property (page 18). While the Ready Reckoner does not show the specific costing requested by the Deputy, it can be estimated on a pro-rata or straight line basis with those displayed in the Ready Reckoner.

Help-To-Buy Scheme Data

159. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of revenue forgone each year by maintaining the help to buy scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36594/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Help to Buy incentive (HTB) was introduced in January 2017 (backdated to July 2016) and is subject to a sunset clause which is scheduled to take effect on 31 December 2019.

I am advised by Revenue that statistics on HTB are available on the Revenue Statistics webpage at:

<https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/documents/statistics/tax-expenditures/help-to-buy-stats.pdf>.

These statistics, which are updated on a monthly basis (most recently at end July), provide a range of information in respect of the scheme, including the number of approved applications and the estimated total cost of approved HTB claims to date.

As of 31 July 2018, some 8,240 claims for HTB have been made, of which 7,658 are approved. The estimated total value of approved HTB claims to date is some €110.7 million, of which some €17.8 million represents retrospective claims (for the period 19 July to 31 December 2016) some €61.2 million represents claims made in respect of 2017 and some €31.7 million represents claims in respect of 2018.

As the Deputy may be aware, a cost benefit analysis of the incentive is being undertaken at the present time and I expect that it will be completed in the coming weeks.

Tax Data

160. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of revenue that would be raised annually by implementing four new tax bands by amounts (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36595/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): It is assumed that the Deputy's proposed tax rates and bands would be integrated into the current tax system together rather than in isolation.

On the above basis, I am advised by Revenue that the estimated yield to the Exchequer from the introduction of the suggested rates and bands would be in the order of €1.6 billion and €2.1 billion on a first year and full year basis, respectively.

These estimates were generated by reference to 2019 incomes, calculated on the basis of actual data for the year 2016, which is the latest year for which returns are available and adjusted as necessary for income, self-employment and interim employment trends.

However, these estimates do not take account of any changes in behavioural patterns that could arise as the result of such increases, including the increase in the marginal rates of tax.

Tax Code

161. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance his plans for a site value tax; the estimated revenue that might be raised by this measure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36597/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The 2012 report of the Inter-departmental Group on the Design of a Local Property Tax (the "Thornhill Group") comprehensively examined the basis of assessment for the Local Property Tax (LPT), including both the taxable value of the property option and a site value tax (SVT). The report favoured the use of market value of residential properties as the basis of assessment and this recommendation was accepted by the Government.

The Thornhill Group concluded that the arguments for SVT were outweighed by the likely difficulties in ensuring acceptance by taxpayers, i.e., arriving at values that were evidence based, understandable and acceptable to the public in addition to complexities and uncertainties in the valuation effort necessary to put an SVT in place. In contrast, the Group considered that under a market value approach applied to housing, the market value of a residential property

would be related to the characteristics of the building itself, the site on which it was located and the characteristics and amenities of the neighbourhood. There would be a relationship between the market value of a house and benefits to the owners in terms of enjoyment of the amenity value of the properties.

At the request of the Minister for Finance, the operation of the LPT was reviewed in 2015 by Dr. Thornhill. A number of submissions to the review favoured changing the basis of determination of LPT liabilities to site value, floor area or variations thereof. Dr. Thornhill considered these but remained of the view that market value is the most appropriate and equitable basis on which to determine LPT liabilities.

Both Commissions on Taxation in 1985 and 2009 favoured property taxation based on market value citing inter alia significant difficulties in communicating to home-owners and land-holders the nature of the taxation charge that is involved and the benefits that would accrue from that change.

At my request the Department of Finance is currently finalising a review of the LPT in conjunction with the Departments of Public Expenditure and Reform, Housing Planning and Local Government and the Taoiseach and the Revenue Commissioners. The review is looking in particular at the impact on LPT liabilities of property price developments and includes a consultation process to enable all interested parties and individuals to submit their views on the future of the LPT.

I have no plans to introduce a Site Value Tax.

Tax Reliefs Data

162. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of tax saved by financial institutions here due to their ability to use historical losses to reduce current liabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36600/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am informed by Revenue that on the basis of Corporation Tax returns filed for the year 2016, the estimated tax saved by all financial institutions, including insurance companies, due to their ability to use historic losses to reduce tax liabilities was in the region of €925 million. This includes the tax cost associated with capital allowances that are claimed as losses forward if not used in the first year of claim.

Loss relief is a long standing feature of the Irish Corporate Tax system and is relevant to all business sectors. It allows for losses incurred in the course of business to be taken into account when calculating a business's tax liabilities. Loss relief is a standard feature of Corporation Tax systems in all OECD countries. It recognises the fact that a business cycle runs over several years and that it would be unbalanced to tax profits earned in one year and not allow relief for losses incurred in another.

Further information on trading losses carried forward in various sectors is published in the Revenue statistical report "Corporation Tax 2017 Payments and 2016 Returns", available on the Revenue website at <https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/documents/research/ct-analysis-2018.pdf>.

Corporation Tax

163. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance the effective corpora-

tion tax rate in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36601/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that a detailed paper on Corporation Tax statistics in respect of 2016 returns and 2017 payments is available on the Revenue website at <https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/documents/research/ct-analysis-2018.pdf>.

This paper shows that for the tax year 2016, the latest year available, the effective rate of Corporation Tax on aggregate net taxable profits, after taking account of various deductions, allowances, charges and reliefs was 10 per cent. Information for 2017 will be published in 2019 when Corporation Tax returns for the year have been analysed.

On the matter of the effective corporate tax rate paid by corporations in Ireland, the Deputy will be aware that there have been seemingly conflicting figures and methodologies used in reference to Ireland. Therefore in 2014, my Department prepared and presented a report for the Finance Committee to explain figures which are quoted and attributed to Ireland on this matter. This technical paper, co-authored by an independent academic, provides clarity on the matter and is available online via the following link: http://www.budget.gov.ie/Budgets/2015/Documents/Technical_Paper_Effective_Rates_Corporation_Tax_Ireland.pdf.

Based on data from the Central Statistics Office and Revenue, this technical paper highlighted that, from 2003, the effective corporate tax rates on Net Operating Surplus and Taxable Income averaged 10.9% and 10.7% respectively. While these percentages are lower than the 12.5% headline rate, this can be attributed to the availability of the small number of targeted tax measures that are available in Ireland that may lower the effective rate of corporation tax paid in Ireland.

Furthermore, the Comptroller and Auditor General's (C&AG) Report Annual Report for 2016 highlighted that 79 of the top 100 companies paid an effective rate of 10% or more, and almost two-thirds paid in excess of 12%.

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

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

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

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

Excise Duties

164. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if it is possible to break down excise duty on alcohol based on final sale to the customer; the breakdown of excise duty on alcohol in each of the past three years by pubs, restaurants, hotels, off-licences and grocery and supermarkets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36603/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that a breakdown of the Excise Duty on alcohol, based on final sale to the customer in the requested categories, is not available. The available information is a breakdown by commodity (beer, cider, wine, spirits) and this is published at: <https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/excise/receipts-volume-and-price/excise-receipts-commodity.aspx>

Credit Union Regulation

165. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Finance if he is satisfied that the lending limits imposed by the Central Bank on a credit union (details supplied) are fair and reasonable; if these lending limits allow this credit union to operate competitively; his views on the future viability of the credit union due to the very restrictive lending limits imposed by the Central Bank; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36615/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy is aware the Central Bank has statutory responsibility for the registration, regulation and supervision of credit unions in Ireland.

While it would not be appropriate to comment on a specific regulatory matter concerning a specific credit union, I have been advised by the Central Bank that, in accordance with its statutory responsibility, it regulates and supervises all credit unions with a view to the protection by each credit union of its members' funds and maintenance of financial stability and the well-being of credit unions. It is the responsibility of each credit union at all times to ensure compliance with legal and regulatory requirements. Where instances of failure to comply with regulatory requirements are identified the Central Bank uses appropriate regulatory, enforcement or other powers.

Regulatory directions, such as those imposing lending restrictions, are issued in the interest of the orderly and proper regulation of the business of a credit union with the purpose of ensuring that the credit union is provided with specific, proportionate, time-bound actions to address the specific issues identified.

The Central Bank works closely with all credit unions who have regulatory directions imposed to ensure that all outstanding supervisory issues are addressed by the board of the credit union to the satisfaction of the Central Bank.

Loan Books Purchasers

166. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance if he or banks here are taking direction from the European Central Bank regarding the sale of loan and mortgage portfolios to investment companies; if his attention has been drawn to reports in the media that a bank (details supplied) is forced by law to hide losses due to the fact that it has to comply with accounting standard IAS 39; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36634/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware since the onset of the financial crisis, significant progress has been made by the Irish banks in reducing Non-Performing Loans (NPLs) from their peak. A major contributor to this progress has been the number of mortgage restructures the banks have agreed with their customers. There are currently over 137,000 mortgage restructures in place covering both owner occupied and buy-to-let facilities.

Despite this progress, the NPL ratios of the Irish banks remain at an elevated level and are well above the European average of c. 4%. Permanent TSB (PTSB) is a particular outlier in this regard with a ratio of c. 25%, before the recent loan sale (Project Glas) took place. Given this position, the banking regulatory authorities have tasked the management and board of each institution with developing and implementing a strategy with the expectation that they will reduce their NPL ratio towards the European average within a defined time period.

The decisions around the content of these strategies are the responsibility of the Board and management of the banks themselves and the banking regulatory authorities have not mandated any specific actions.

With regards to the second part of your question, a number of Parliamentary Questions have been answered in the past in relation to rules adopted by banks when valuing assets including loans. These rules are determined by the relevant accounting standards and it is the responsibility of the directors of the respective banks to ensure these rules have been properly applied. To provide assurance that this is the case, the proper application of the rules is subject to an annual independent external audit review. ? ?

Nothing has been brought to my attention to suggest that these rules have not been correctly applied by the banks. Notwithstanding this, should the Deputy have concerns in this regard, she may wish to refer such concerns to the Irish Auditing and Accounting Supervisory Authority (IAASA), the independent body responsible for the examination and enforcement of certain listed entities' financial reporting. ?

Finally, the requirement for banks to prepare financial statements is laid out in the Companies Acts. The Companies Acts come under the scope of the Department for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation. The Director of Corporate Enforcement has widespread powers and functions in relation to potential breaches of the Companies Acts.?

European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

167. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the status of the appointment of Ireland's directorship of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. [36647/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Currently Ireland's Director of the EBRD is a senior Department of Finance Official who is holding the post on a temporary basis in advance of the completion of the process to appoint a new Director. Ireland's nominee for Director of the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) has been selected through an open competitive process. An advertisement inviting expressions of interest from suitably qualified candidates was placed on the Department of Finance website on 27 March 2018. Following a shortlisting exercise and competitive interview conducted by a four-person Selection Committee, one candidate was recommended for the post of Ireland's Director of the EBRD. Cabinet approval for the nomination of this individual was secured in July.

The process of formally notifying EBRD management and our EBRD constituency partners

(Denmark, Lithuania and Kosovo) of Ireland's nominee is under way. Subject to agreement from our constituency partners I expect that the successful candidate will be in post within the next few months.

VAT Rate Increases

168. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance if the 9% VAT rate for the hospitality sector will be retained in view of the negative impact which a rise in VAT rates would have for the hotel industry (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36714/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, it is a long-standing practice of the Minister for Finance not to comment, in advance of the Budget, on any tax matters that might be the subject of Budget decisions

Stamp Duty

169. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the position in regard to stamp duty and tax in cases in which a parent plans to transfer the family home or part thereof to a son or daughter who has been living in the home for at least seven years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36771/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I have been advised by Revenue of the position in relation to the transfer of a family home insofar as capital acquisitions tax, stamp duty and capital gains tax are concerned.

Capital acquisitions tax

Section 86 of the Capital Acquisitions Tax Consolidation Act 2003 provides for an exemption, subject to certain conditions, in relation to dwelling houses that allows for property to be inherited tax-free where the beneficiary (regardless of relationship to the deceased person) is already living in the house. Firstly, the inherited house must have been the deceased person's principal private residence at the date of his or her death. This requirement is relaxed in situations where the deceased person had to leave the house before the date of death because of ill health; for example, to live in a nursing home. In addition, the beneficiary must not have a beneficial interest in another residential property. Finally, the beneficiary must have lived in the house for 3 years prior to the date of the inheritance and must continue to live in the house for 6 years after the date of the inheritance.

A transfer of a house for no consideration is treated as a gift. With one exception, it is not possible to receive a tax-free gift of a dwelling house. The exception is where a person gifts a dwelling house to a 'dependent relative'. For this purpose, a dependent relative is a direct relative of the donor, or of the donor's spouse or civil partner, who is permanently and totally incapacitated because of physical or mental infirmity from maintaining himself or herself or who is over the age of 65. If a beneficiary qualifies as a 'dependent relative' then there is no requirement that the house be the principal private residence of the deceased person or the donor or that the beneficiary remain in the house for 6 years after the date of the gift or inheritance.

The same treatment applies in relation to a part of a building as it does to an entire building, provided that the part of the building involved was used as a dwelling house, or was suitable for such use, and meets the qualifying conditions for the exemption in its own right: for example, a

‘granny flat’ that forms part of a house or an individual apartment in an apartment block.

Stamp duty

The transfer of a property that is a family home, or part of a family home, to a son or daughter constitutes a conveyance on sale for the purposes of the Stamp Duties Consolidation Act (SDCA) 1999. Stamp duty is payable by the transferee, whether or not it was transferred by way of sale or gift. Where a property is sold, or otherwise transferred, for less than market value, section 30 SDCA 1999 imposes a charge to stamp duty at the market value of the property.

Stamp duty on transfers of residential property is chargeable at the rate of 1% where the consideration does not exceed €1 million. Where the consideration exceeds €1 million, stamp duty is chargeable at 1% on the first €1 million and 2% on the balance in excess of €1 million.

Capital gains tax

The transfer of a family home to a son or daughter is exempt from capital gains tax if the property was the main family residence for the period of the parent’s ownership.

Personal Contract Plans

170. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the status of regulatory changes that have been introduced since the publication by the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission of its report on personal contract plans PCPs, specifically, if PCP providers will be obliged to undertake a credit assessment before issuing such products and if PCPs will fall under the Central Bank’s consumer protection code; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36813/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission and the Central Bank both produced papers on the PCP market in Ireland in March of this year. These reports demonstrated that PCP finance has grown considerably in recent years and is becoming an increasingly important source of finance for the purchase of new cars. While the availability of such credit is important for the finance and motor industries, it is also important that the level of information and protections available to consumers in relation to such products continues to be robust.

Following on from these publications, I commissioned Mr. Michael Tutty, a former Regulator and Second Secretary in the Department of Finance, to carry out an independent review of the current PCP market and regulatory structure to see if there are any particular consumer protection gaps which may need to be addressed. As part of his work Mr. Tutty has consulted both the Central Bank and the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission along with a number of other key stakeholders. I expect to receive Mr Tutty’s report very shortly and I will then consider the report and any recommendations it may contain.

Tax Reliefs Data

171. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of share options that have been issued under the key employee engagement programme; the number of employees availing of the programme; the number of companies utilising the programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36814/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that, as the

Key Employee Engagement Programme (KEEP) only came into effect on 1 January 2018, details of the costs and numbers availing of this programme will only be available once the relevant employer tax returns for 2018 have been received and processed. The first KEEP return is due 31 March 2019.

Tax Data

172. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the breakdown of taxpayer units by single person, married persons or civil partners with one income and married persons or civil partners with two incomes for each gross income range, similar to that set out in the Revenue Commissioners' ready reckoner; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36815/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that information on the earnings distributions for tax years from 2004 to 2016 is available at: <https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/income-distributions/it-ct-distributions.aspx>.

The Table titled "RVA01 - Distribution of Income Tax by Type of Gross Income, Range of Gross Income, Marital Status, Year and Statistic" provides data on gross income range broken down by marital status, as sought by the Deputy.

Universal Social Charge Data

173. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated full year cost of removing the 3% universal social charge, USC, levy for non-PAYE income over €100,000; the number of persons it would impact; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36816/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the 3% USC levy for non-PAYE income over €100,000 is paid by approximately 12,400 taxpayer units.

Abolishing this surcharge would have an estimated full year cost to the Exchequer of the order of €125 million.

These estimates have been generated by reference to projected 2019 incomes, calculated on the basis of actual data for 2016, the latest year for which returns are available, and adjusted as necessary for income, self-employment and employment trends in the interim.

Tax Yield

174. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated full-year cost of reducing the effective tax rate on dividends to 32%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36817/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): It is assumed that the Deputy is referring to introducing a 32% flat tax rate on dividend income from Irish resident companies to replace all Income Tax, USC and PRSI currently collected.

I am advised by Revenue that based on tax returns for 2016 and the yield from Dividend Withholding Tax for the same year, a tentative estimate of the potential tax gain from imposing

a flat tax rate of 32% on dividend income is in the region of €70 million.

Tax Yield

175. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated full-year cost of reducing the capital gains tax rate to 20%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36818/18]

177. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated full-year cost of reducing the capital gains tax rate on the disposal of small and medium enterprise, SME, shares from 33% to 10%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36820/18]

178. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated full-year cost of reducing the capital gains tax rate on employment and investment incentive scheme qualifying investment or equivalent gains from 33% to 0%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36821/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 175, 177 and 178 together.

I am informed by Revenue that estimates of the Exchequer impact from changes to the rate of Capital Gains Tax (CGT) can be found in the Revenue Ready-Reckoner at <http://www.revenue.ie/en/about/statistics/ready-reckoner.pdf>. While the Ready Reckoner does not show the cost of reducing the rate to 20% as requested by the Deputy, it can be estimated on a pro-rata or straight-line basis with the costings that are shown.

As such and on a straight line basis it is estimated that the approximate cost of reducing the capital gains tax rate to 20% would be in the region of €442 million. It should be noted that these costs are estimated on the basis of no behavioural change.

In relation to Questions 36820-18 and 36821-18, Revenue does not have the necessary data to separately identify CGT in respect of the disposal of SME shares or qualifying investments in the Employment and Investment Incentive Scheme. Therefore, there is no basis available to Revenue on which to cost the proposals requested by the Deputy.

Tax Reliefs Costs

176. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated full-year cost of increasing the lifetime limit on entrepreneurial relief to €15 million; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36819/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): It is assumed that the Deputy is referring to the revised Entrepreneur Relief provided for in Section 597AA of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997. I am advised by Revenue that the current lifetime limit applicable to this relief is €1 million in chargeable gains at a CGT rate of 10%. The cost of increasing this limit to €15 million as suggested by the Deputy would be approximately €50 million in a full year. This cost is based on claims in respect of Entrepreneur Relief that were included in 2016 tax returns and does not take account of any potential behavioural change.

Questions Nos. 177 and 178 answered with Question No. 175.

VAT Rate Reductions

179. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated full-year cost decreasing the standard rate VAT to 20%; if this is possible under European rules; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36822/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Irish VAT law must comply with the EU VAT Directive, which directs that Member States must apply a standard VAT rate of 15% or more. Ireland's standard VAT rate is currently 23% and it is possible under EU VAT law to reduce the rate to 20%.

Reducing the standard rate from 23% to 20% would cost the Exchequer almost €1.4 billion. Further statistics in relation to the cost or yield from changing VAT rates is available in the Pre-Budget 2019 Revenue Commissioners Ready Reckoner, which is available at the following link: <https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/documents/statistics/ready-reckoner.pdf>.

VAT Yield

180. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated full-year cost of raising the VAT registration threshold for small and medium enterprises from €37,500 to €100,000; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36823/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): VAT is governed by the EU VAT Directive, with which Irish VAT law must comply. The VAT Directive provides that VAT registration thresholds may only be raised by Member States to maintain their value in real terms, that is, they may only be increased in line with inflation. Our VAT thresholds were increased to their current values, €37,500 for services and €75,000 for goods, on 1 May 2008 and as the Central Statistics Office figures show the consumer price index is below the level it reached in 2008, therefore it is not possible to increase these thresholds.

Ireland's VAT registration thresholds for small enterprises and the self-employed are among the highest in the EU. In addition, SMEs benefit from a wide range of VAT simplification measures. These include:

- simplified and electronic invoicing,
- special schemes for retailers and pharmacists,
- the facility to make VAT returns on a bi-annual or annual basis,
- the facility for small businesses to submit an annual VIES return rather than monthly
- the cash receipts basis of accounting where the trader is not required to pay VAT until payment for the supply is received, and
- the Mini One Stop Shop (MOSS) which allows business to register, file and pay VAT due in all Member States through a single portal.

Mortgage Repayments

181. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to consult with the head of the Central Bank to confirm the way in which the mortgage accounts of customers who have

renegotiated terms and are repaying the mortgage under those terms can be classed as non-performing; the efforts being made to ensure that customers who continue to meet their commitments are protected from the possibility of their account being sold on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36831/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Since the establishment of the Single Supervisory Mechanism (SSM) in November 2014, the focus has shifted from reducing mortgage arrears levels to reducing Non-performing Loans (NPLs). This shift in focus has been accompanied by a new strict definition Europe-wide of what constitutes an NPL by the European Banking Authority (EBA) which means that certain restructures are deemed NPL even if customers are meeting the revised payment schedule.

Officials in my Department met with staff of the SSM at the highest level on two occasions since late 2016. I also met Ms Nouy, Chair of the Supervisory Board of the ECB. In the course of these discussions my officials outlined the background and history to the restructuring effort in Ireland and questioned the logic of now classifying some types of restructured loans, including certain split mortgages, as NPL indefinitely. While we have been informed that the SSM is looking into the regulatory treatment of split mortgages across a number of European member states I have no evidence at this point that this categorisation is going to change.

I have been advised by the Central Bank of Ireland that in 2014, the European Banking Authority (EBA) introduced harmonized definitions of forbearance and non-performing for supervisory reporting purposes (referred to as the ITS on forbearance and non-performing exposures).

Per the EBA Implementing Technical Standards on supervisory reporting and the ECB Guidance on non-performing loans, non-performing exposures are those that satisfy either or both of the following criteria:

1. material exposures which are more than 90 days past-due;
2. the debtor is assessed as unlikely to pay its credit obligations in full without realisation of collateral, regardless of the existence of any past-due amount or of the number of days past due.”

Exposures should be classified as non-performing and/or forborne if they meet the relevant criteria outlined in the EBA ITS. In relation to curing, paragraph 157 outlines the criteria required for a non-performing forborne exposure to move back to performing status. Restructured NPLs can migrate back to performing when the criteria outlined in the EBA ITS has been satisfied, and it is the bank’s responsibility to conduct that assessment. Depending on the specificities of the restructure, it can take at least a year for a restructured NPL to move back to performing status.

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

Credit servicing firms must act in accordance with the requirements of Irish financial services law that applies to ‘regulated financial service providers’. This ensures that consumers,

whose loans are sold to another firm, maintain the same regulatory protections that they had prior to the sale, including under the various statutory Codes of Conduct issued by the Central Bank such as the Consumer Protection Code 2012, Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears 2013, and the SME Regulations. Contractual terms are not changed by the sale of the loan.

Provision 3.11 of the Central Bank's Consumer Protection Code 2012 (the Code) requires that, where a regulated lender intends to transfer all or part of its 'regulated activities' to another regulated entity, it must provide advance notification to both the Central Bank and affected consumers. Specifically, a lender must provide a consumer with at least 2 months' notice before transferring all or part of its loan book covered by the Code to another person, including where the transferee is an unregulated entity. Where the transferee is an unregulated entity, the Code requires that the regulated lender also notify the consumer of the name of the regulated entity that will be 'servicing' the loan for the unregulated entity. In the event that there is a change in the credit servicing firm, the existing credit servicing firm must also notify the Central Bank and the consumer in advance, in accordance with the timelines set out under Provision 3.11 of the Code. Furthermore, I understand that the Central Bank expects all affected consumers to be informed of the term of their loan agreement which allows the loan to be sold and the identity and address of the new owner.

The Deputy will be aware that a Private Member's Bill now titled the Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing Firms) Bill 2018 was considered by Select committee on 12 July. My officials worked with Deputy McGrath and other stakeholders to develop the Bill as initiated. This Bill will require that loan owners are regulated by the Central Bank. I expect that Report Stage will be taken after the summer recess.

I have also asked the Central Bank to carry out a review of the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears (CCMA) to ensure it remains as effective as possible and for the review to be completed as soon as possible.

Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland

182. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Finance the bank and non-bank on lender of Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland, SBCI, funds in 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and the monetary amount loaned to SMEs to date. [36914/18]

183. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Finance the lending targets the SBCI has set for lending to SMEs in 2017 and in 2018, in tabular form; and the progress to date on same. [36915/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 182 and 183 together.

The Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) is Ireland's National Promotional Institution for SMEs and its strategic mission is to deliver effective financial supports to Irish SMEs that address failures in the Irish credit market, while driving competition and innovation and ensuring the efficient use of available EU resources. The SBCI achieves this aim through the provision of low cost liquidity and risk sharing activities supporting the provision of appropriately priced, flexible funding to SMEs.

The SBCI does not lend directly. Rather, the SBCI operates through its partner finance providers, known as on-lenders. The SBCI currently has three bank and four non-bank on-lenders: AIB; Bank of Ireland; Ulster Bank; First Citizen Finance; Finance Ireland; Bibby Financial Services Ireland and FEXCO Asset Finance.

The Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland commenced on-lending in March 2015. To the end of March 2018, the SBCI has supported loans through both its on-lending and risk-sharing activities, totaling €952m to 23,867 Irish SMEs supporting 122,227 jobs. The SMEs who received SBCI finance are from a variety of business and economic sectors, and they are spread across every region of the country.

The SBCI is currently seeking to broaden its distribution capability and market coverage thereby serving to meet the needs of Irish SMEs and drive competition in the SME finance market. The SBCI continues to work on developing new innovative products, such as the Brexit Loan Scheme, which was launched in March 2018. This €300m scheme is designed to provide funding support to enable eligible Irish businesses to implement necessary changes to address the challenges posed by Brexit. Additionally, the SBCI is also continuing to work on a number of other initiatives, including the continued use of guarantees and risk sharing schemes to support lending by finance providers. These aim to address recognised market failures and improve the risk appetite of partner finance providers.

Chronological Table of SBCI Funds and Guarantees Committed to On-Lenders

Date	On Lender	Liquidity (Funds)	Risk Sharing (Guarantees Provided)
Dec-14	Bank of Ireland	€200m	
Feb-15	Allied Irish Bank	€200m	
Oct-15	Finance Ireland	€51m	
Nov-15	Merrion Fleet	€25m*	
Nov-15	Allied Irish Bank	€200m	
Dec-15	Ulster Bank	€75m	
May-16	First Citizen Agri Finance	€40m	
Jun-16	Bibby Financial Services Ireland	€45m	
Nov-16	Fexco Asset Finance	€70m	
Jan-17	Bank of Ireland		€65m
Jan-17	Allied Irish Bank		€60m
Jan-17	Ulster Bank		€25m
Mar-18	Bank of Ireland		€128m
Mar-18	Allied Irish Bank		€122m
Mar-18	Ulster Bank		€50m
May-18	Bibby Financial Services Ireland	€25m	

*Facility closed in July 2017 following the sale of Merrion Fleet to Société Générale

SBCI liquidity funding remains available through Finance Ireland, First Citizen, Bibby Financial Services Ireland and Fexco Asset Finance.

Risk-sharing activities totaling €450m were provided via the €150m Agricultural Cashflow Loan Scheme launched in January 2017 and more recently through the €300m Brexit Loan Scheme launched in March 2018.

The SBCI's lending to SMEs is largely driven by market demands and needs that are not fully met by the private sector. The Deputy can rest assured that the SBCI is working to develop a more diverse range of on-lenders and innovative products. This will enable it to broaden its dis-

tribution capability and market coverage, meet the evolving requirements of the SME finance market and contribute to a sustainable and competitive economy in the medium to long term

Small and Medium Enterprises

184. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Finance if he has requested from the main pillar banks and other financial lenders the reason SME bank finance rejection rates have increased, especially among micro-sized companies as outlined in the SME market report from the Central Bank for the first quarter of 2018 (details supplied); and if he or the Central Bank has raised with such bodies the reason bank rejection rates for SME loans and or overdrafts here are more than twice the rates in comparator countries. [36922/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy will be aware that in my role as Minister for Finance I have no direct function in the relationship between the banks and their customers. I have no statutory function in relation to the banking decisions made by individual lending institutions at any particular time; these are taken by the board and management of the relevant institution. This includes decisions in relation to rejection rates as determined by the banks.

However, the Government is conscious of the important role SMEs play in our economy. In this regard, my Department commissions biannual surveys to ascertain the demand for credit by SMEs, as well as related issues. The SME Credit Demand Survey, October 2017 – March 2018, which was published last Monday, 27th August, shows that bank rejection rates have decreased for micro SMEs. The latest SME Credit Demand Survey report shows that refusal rates amongst micro companies have decreased to 16% in March 2018 from 21% in March 2017, while small and medium-sized businesses seeking finance have also indicated higher levels of approval rates. The survey shows that in total, 88% of all applications for the past six months (excluding “still pending”) have been approved in full/partially, similar to March 2017. Longitudinally, the Credit Demand Survey shows that overall rejection rates for SMEs have been reducing since the beginning of the series, from 23% in March 2012 to 12% in March 2018.

The SME Credit Demand Surveys is currently conducted by Fitzpatrick Associates in conjunction with Behaviour and Attitudes, on behalf of the Department. It is the most comprehensive survey of SME Credit Demand in Ireland, covering over 1,500 respondents through in-depth discussions. The survey ensures that it captures a full picture of the SME landscape in Ireland, with micro enterprises, small-sized enterprises and medium-sized enterprises accurately represented as per the percentage make-up of SMEs in Ireland.

The SME Credit Demand Survey is available at <https://www.finance.gov.ie/updates/sme-credit-demand-survey-october-2017-march-2018/>.

Tax Collection Forecasts

185. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the reason the costing for equalising the earned income tax credit with the PAYE credit has decreased from €42 million first year cost and €76 million full year cost to €28 million first year cost and €46 million full year cost based on the latest Revenue reckoner; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36928/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the estimates originally published in the Pre-Budget 2019 Ready Reckoner for the cost of increasing

the earned income credit were incorrect.

The matter has been rectified and the correct figures are now published in the Ready Reckoner which is available at <https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/ready-reckoner/index.aspx>.

Revenue has confirmed that the earned income credit was the only field in the Ready Reckoner impacted by this error.

Tax Agreements

186. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the analysis his Department has undertaken in respect of the United States of America Tax Cuts and Jobs Act 2017 regarding the new US legislation's provision relating to base erosion and anti-abuse tax; its impact on Irish foreign direct investment from the United States and impact on the Exchequer's corporation tax receipts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36955/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, the base erosion anti-abuse tax or "BEAT" is an anti-avoidance measure that applies to very large companies (\$500 million of sales in the USA per annum) who make large payments to foreign related companies. It works by requiring the company to re-calculate its entire US tax bill to see what it would pay if it were subject to a 10% tax rate but all deductions for payments to related foreign companies were denied.

Much of the detail of the proposed changes remains to be clarified in US IRS and Treasury regulations and questions remain particularly regarding the compatibility of some aspects of the reforms with WTO rules and other international obligations, and until these issues are clarified it is not possible to estimate any potential Exchequer impact.

The BEAT and other reform measures reduce the ability of multinational companies to erode the US tax base. To the extent that the US rules prevent companies from achieving globally low effective tax rates, this change is to be welcomed.

Naturally, US tax reform is of great interest to Ireland given the large volume of US investment here. Foreign Direct Investment has been a key contributor to Ireland's economic development and growth. It has provided rewarding employment for over 300,000 people directly and a transformation of the enterprise base in Ireland.

The level of investment from the US into Ireland cannot be attributed just to corporate tax policy – that is not a fair reflection of the many other reasons that companies choose to locate in Ireland.

Factors such as availability of physical and technological infrastructure, availability of skilled staff, access to the EU market as well as culture and quality of life are also significant and important considerations.

US business will always want to have operations in the EU, and Ireland will remain very competitive and attractive as an EU location to invest in and do business from. US multinationals locating real substantial activity in Ireland will continue to be subject to Irish tax at 12.5% on their profits properly attributable to activity located in Ireland.

BEAT and other measures have been critically received internationally, by the OECD, European Commission and larger EU Member States.

The Department of Finance, and the Irish Embassy in the US, will continue to monitor the situation regarding US Tax reform and will continue to engage with business and others to fully understand the potential impacts of the changes in the US.

Question No. 187 answered with Question No. 138.

Construction Industry

188. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to tackle overheating in the construction sector, specifically the increase in land prices and the lack of skilled workers in the construction sector; his view of the studies which have been carried out in respect of this, in particular land price increases in the greater Dublin area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36963/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Department of Finance continues to monitor developments in the construction sector, including the risk of overheating. While professional training and skills needs in the industry are the responsibility of the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Finance also monitors developments in this area.

The key indicators for the construction sector do not suggest overheating. The construction industry accounts for approximately 7.4 per cent of GDP. For comparison, in 2007 it accounted for 18.6 per cent. In terms of labour supply, workers in the construction industry account for 6.3 per cent of all workers. In 2007, they accounted for 10.6 per cent. Overall, the contribution of construction to the economy is expected to grow with the Department forecasting this to rise to 9.7 per cent of GDP by 2021. The rise is consistent with delivery of the National Development Plan as well as the much needed increase in housing supply. An increase of this magnitude in the overall contribution of construction to the broader economy is both sustainable and desirable given our investment requirements. I also note the results of the recent Quarterly Labour Force Survey showing that the construction sector gained 17,800 employees over the year to Q2 2018, the largest sectoral increase for the period. While there may be a shortage of labour with specific skill sets there does not appear to be a more generalised labour supply problem in the construction industry.

I am nevertheless aware that specific pressures exist. A report by SOLAS earlier this year entitled “Overview of Construction Sector Skills” identified skill shortages in the sector. It also outlined the Agency’s response, which includes a very significant increase in apprenticeships.

Separately, the issue of land price inflation is another matter that my Department continues to monitor. While there are no official data on residential development land prices, reports on construction costs, including land prices, have been published by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government as well as by the Society of Chartered Surveyors Ireland. The Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government report specifically looks at the drivers of land price inflation.

To help tackle land price inflation - and housing inflation more generally - the Government introduced the Vacant Site Levy. The levy aims to encourage land owners to either develop their sites or sell them to those who will. The Vacant Site Levy presents a strong disincentive to land hoarding. In addition, in Budget 2018 I increased the rate of stamp duty on non-residential property from 2 per cent to 6 per cent with a view to refocusing construction activity. Finally, the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government is finalising proposals around the new State land management agency, which will maximise the use of State land as well enter partnerships with private land owners to ensure strategically important land banks are used ef-

ficiently.

Brexit Issues

189. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the level of preparedness if there is to be a hard Brexit, in particular the requirement to expand the Customs and Excise of the Revenue Commissioners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36966/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Government's contingency planning for Brexit was initiated well in advance of the UK referendum in June 2016. To this end, co-ordination of the whole-of-Government response to Brexit is being taken forward through the cross-Departmental coordination structures chaired by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and on 18 July the Tánaiste presented a Memorandum to the Government on Brexit Preparedness and Contingency Planning.

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, was identified as an early priority and 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.

My Department, along with the Revenue Commissioners, is actively engaged in this planning work which has intensified in recent months and is now well advanced. The planning, as appropriate, includes any specific responses necessary according to regional needs and at the county level.

This work has provided 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. This is enabling the modelling of potential responses under different scenarios, such as one where a withdrawal agreement, including a transitional arrangement, is concluded and where a Free Trade Agreement is the basis for the future relationship between the EU and the UK.

On the basis of this work, relevant Departments have now been tasked by the Government to rollout detailed Action Plans with a view to advancing, as appropriate, the mitigating measures which have been identified in the areas of their responsibility from the planning to the implementation phase.

In line with this approach, the Government has already approved a number of key Brexit preparedness measures focused on East-West trade and by the end of September, detailed and costed plans will be presented to Government on additional full time customs staff to carry out relevant controls at ports and airports; and upgrading of infrastructure at ports and airports, in particular Dublin and Rosslare Ports, to facilitate increased customs and SPS controls.

Revenue's priority to date has been on upgrading relevant IT systems to have the most advanced systems possible to support and facilitate smooth and efficient trade flows. Performance testing is well advanced and I am assured by Revenue that based on the work completed to date they are confident that the various IT systems will support the expected additional work load arising from Brexit, ensuring customs processes can continue to operate effectively and efficiently post-Brexit.

Brexit Issues

190. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the further studies and assessments his Department has carried out on the impact of the UK varying its VAT rates post-Brexit, in particular in Northern Ireland; the various policy scenarios it has tested with regard to substantial changes in the UK VAT regime; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36967/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Department of Finance has been assessing and preparing for the impact of Brexit since well before the referendum on 23 June 2016, with this work now intensified. The primary policy areas for the Department relate to the economic and financial sector implications stemming from Brexit. This work is being undertaken within the whole-of-Government framework coordinated by the Department of Foreign Affairs and is vital to guaranteeing Ireland's interests are protected in the negotiation process to ensure that any adverse impacts on our economy are minimised.

The Department undertakes a rolling analysis which focusses on the key Brexit related policy issues, which includes taxation. The issue of VAT and Brexit was analysed in four papers as part of the Tax Strategy Group (TSG) in 2017 and 2018. (TSG 17-06 – Selected VAT Issues, TSG 17-09 – BREXIT Taxation Issues, TSG 18-05 – VAT Issues and TSG 18-08 – Brexit).

The papers identify the rules governing the European Value Added Tax System for goods and services within the VAT Directive (2006/112/EC) to which all 28 EU Member States must adhere and notes that post Brexit, the UK will no longer operate within those EU frameworks. This change has a number of implications for business and consumers.

Like all Government agencies, the Revenue Commissioners are also actively engaged in examining a range of scenarios in order to support Ireland's objectives. However, until the shape of post-Brexit arrangements becomes clear, it will not be possible to formulate specific plans.

There remains a large level of uncertainty in the UK position and the precise future arrangements for taxation shall depend on the outcome of future relationship negotiations between the EU and United Kingdom, and those discussions are currently ongoing.

National Payments Plan Implementation

191. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the further work which has been carried out in respect of the national payments strategy with the Central Bank and financial services industry, in particular the expansion of such services that can be carried out by credit unions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36971/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Over the past number of years, the EU has been creating a single market for payments across the Member States and my Department has been working on transposing those measures.

The Payment Accounts Directive was transposed in September 2016, ensuring access to a payment account with basic features for anyone who does not have a payment account. The revised Payment Services Directive (PSD2), transposed earlier this year, further opens the EU payment market for companies offering consumer or business-oriented payment services based on access to payment accounts and ensures a level playing field for both existing and new players.

The Deputy may also be interested to know that the Central Bank intends to establish a forum on retail payments, and that my Department has commissioned research to benchmark payments in Ireland.

The provision of payment services by credit unions is subject to the provisions of the Credit Union Act 1997 and the Credit Union Act 1997 (Regulatory Requirements) Regulations 2016, which allow credit unions to engage in a variety of payment services. Certain additional payment services, including current accounts, require Central Bank approval.

To date the Central Bank has approved a suite of additional services known as a Member Personal Current Account Service (MPCAS) for 46 credit unions having aggregate total assets of €8.1bn of total sectoral assets of €17.5bn. The approved MPCAS service allows credit unions to offer debit cards, overdrafts and a full range of payment services. The Central Bank has published details of MPCAS on its website along with the approval process, details of the application requirements and related guidance. The timing of the roll-out of MPCAS is a matter for credit unions themselves.

Budget Submissions

192. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if his Department has received the budget 2019 submission from an organisation (details supplied) in respect of the financial difficulties in the sector such as the shortfall in many residential developments' sinking funds, the possible impact this may have in future years on the public purse; the relief which can be given to home owners who own apartments in such developments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36974/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My Department has so far received in the order of 200 Pre-Budget Submissions from a wide range of groups and individuals. These are being considered by the relevant officials in the context of Budget and Finance Bill preparation. I can confirm that a submission from the organization in question has been received. However, as the Deputy will be aware, it is not the practice of the Minister for Finance to discuss the details of measures which may be under consideration as part of the Budget and Finance Bill.

Private Rented Accommodation

193. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if his Department studied the recent report by a company (details supplied) in respect of residential rent increases; the work which has been carried out in conjunction with the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government on this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36975/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Department of Finance monitors developments in the residential rental market on an ongoing basis. My Department uses data from daft.ie, the Central Statistics Office, the Residential Tenancies Board and myhome.ie to monitor rental prices as well as the supply and stock of rental properties.

Rental market policy is primarily the responsibility of my colleague the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government and his Department leads on work in that area. The Government's primary response to mitigating rental inflation is to increase supply of residential property. 'Rebuilding Ireland: An Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness' sets out a comprehensive package of actionable measures designed to restore the housing market to a sustainable equilibrium.

Officials from my Department regularly meet with officials from the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to discuss housing policy. The Department of Finance is leading the work on the establishment of

Home Building Finance Ireland, which will provide finance to home builders on a commercial basis and further improve the supply of residential property in areas where it is needed.

The construction sector is expanding strongly, and this is now feeding into the growing supply of residential property. New house completions in the four quarters to Q2 2018 are up 40 per cent to 16,314, while planning permission was granted for 8,405 units in Q1 2018, up 81 per cent on Q1 2017. This growing supply response will mitigate the pressure on residential rents.

Construction Industry

194. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the activity levels in different sectors of the construction industry; the extent to which the industry is active in commercial development, residential development, hotel and leisure development, student accommodation and so on; the way in which such activity and trends in the sector are monitored by or on behalf of his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35429/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I should begin by explaining my Department's role in relation to the matter raised by the Deputy. In February 2018 my Department produced the National Development Plan (NDP) 2018-2027 which, together with the National Planning Framework makes up Project Ireland 2040.

The NDP sets out a strategic vision for Ireland's public infrastructure priorities over the next 10 years and is strictly aligned with the National Strategic Outcomes contained in the National Planning Framework (NPF). The plan signals a shift to a greater integration of regional investment plans, stronger coordination of sectoral strategies and more rigorous selection and appraisal of projects to secure value-for-money.

Achieving value-for-money is dependent on, among other things, a healthy, sustainable, competitive and well-functioning construction industry which offers good long-term quality employment and a sustainable level of construction output.

To that end, a commitment was made in the NDP to establish a Construction Sector Group in order to ensure regular and open dialogue between Government and the construction Sector.

The first meeting of the Group has taken place and an ambitious work programme is now in development.

As an important initial project, the Investment Projects and Programmes Office within the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform is compiling a Construction Sector Activity Report which will chart key trends in the sector including output, costs, labour market trends and productivity.

This work will add to the information and research which already exists in relation to this sector. For example the Department of Finance produce a "Housing and Property Sector Chartpack" (<https://www.finance.gov.ie/updates/housing-and-property-sector-chartpack-july2018/>)

Furthermore, the Central Statistics Office produce a number of relevant statistics in relation to this matter, including:

- Gross Domestic Physical Capital Formation by Item and Year
- Volume of Production Index in Building and Construction by Type of Building and Construction

- Planning permissions granted by type of construction

The Construction Sector Activity Report will incorporate statistics such as these in order to give a comprehensive assessment of trends across the different components of the construction sector.

Public Sector Pensions Levy

195. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the reason public servants are paying slightly more in pension levy than in pension contributions; if this can be reversed; the amount collected from this levy since 2011; the way in which the revenue has been spent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35526/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Pension-Related Deduction (PRD) is provided for in law under the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2009 (as amended). PRD is a deduction from the salary of Public Servants who

1. are members of a Public Service pension scheme,
2. have an entitlement to a Public Service pension benefit, preserved or in payment, or
3. who receive/have received a payment-in-lieu of such a pension.

PRD confers no additional pension benefit and is not linked to the pension contribution an individual is required to make. The PRD thresholds, as provided for in law, are currently set for the year 2018 as follows:

- First €28,750 of remuneration – 0%
- Next €31,250 of remuneration – 10%
- Balance of remuneration – 10.5%

PRD collected forms part of voted appropriations-in-aid, offsetting the gross expenditure of individual Departments.

There are no plans to amend the thresholds provided for under PRD legislation. It should be noted that PRD will be replaced by the Additional Superannuation Contribution (ASC) with effect from 1 January 2019.

The PRD yield for the years from 2011 to date is detailed as follows:

Year	PRD Yield
2011	€960,224,000
2012	€934,739,000
2013	€925,986,000
2014	€877,800,000
2015	€875,985,000
2016	€705,998,000
2017	€732,064,000
2018	€744,966,000

Note 1: The years 2011 to 2016 do not include Local Government PRD yield.

Note 2: The years 2017 and 2018 are estimated yields.

Public Procurement Contracts Data

196. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the cost in 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018 of all contracts awarded to private contractors via the Office of Government Procurement for secure printing across all Departments and other agencies covered by the GDP. [35530/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Office of Government Procurement (OGP) supports and facilitates Contracting Authorities in awarding contracts for a variety of print services. The OGP does not have a specific category for ‘secure printing’ however has facilitated procurement competitions on behalf of Contracting Authorities for print services which have included elements of security. Such competitions have involved printing materials which included security features, and print jobs where the security of the printed materials was paramount.

The total aggregated spend on contracts which the OGP has facilitated on behalf of Contracting Authorities which included elements of security is as follows; 2016: €1.84 million, 2017: €1.7 million, 2018: €7.6 million.

Garda Stations

197. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the reason the reply to Parliamentary Question No. 119 of 12 July 2018 stated that Lauragh Garda station, County Kerry, was sold for €115,000 on 16 February 2016 when the State property register states that the property was sold on that day for €50,000; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35717/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The former Garda station at Lauragh, Co. Kerry closed in 2013 under the Garda Rationalisation Programme. The Commissioners of Public Works sold the property for €115,000 and the monies were received in March 2016.

The Residential Property Price Register is produced by the Property Services Regulatory Authority pursuant to Section 86 of the Property Services (Regulation) Act 2011. It holds the date of sale, price and address of residential properties purchased since January, 2010, as declared by the purchaser to the Revenue Commissioners for the purposes of Stamp Duty. The data is provided by persons conveyancing a property on behalf of the purchaser. Therefore, the data entered on the Register in this case is not a matter for the Office of Public Works.

Public Procurement Regulations

198. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O’Mahony** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the annual turnover a construction company needs to have in order to tender via the e-tender system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35731/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Public procurement in Ireland is governed by legal requirements, rules and guidelines set both at national and EU level. The aim of European and national rules is to promote an open, competitive and

non-discriminatory public procurement regime which delivers best value for money. The general requirements for works and works-related contracts are set out in the Capital Works Management Framework (CWMF). This guidance incorporates key elements of EU legislation that have been transposed into Irish law and is complemented by circulars and guidance issued by this Department and the Office of Government Procurement.

The management of the tendering process for a public contract is a matter for each contracting authority. It is the responsibility of each contracting authority to ensure that tenderers comply with all the requirements of the process.

Under the EU Directives governing public procurement, contracts above certain thresholds must be advertised on the Official Journal of the EU and awarded on the basis of objective and non-restrictive criteria. For works contracts the threshold is €5.548 million; for supplies and service contracts awarded by Government Departments the threshold is €144,000 and for local authorities and non-central bodies the threshold is €221,000. In the case of contracts below the threshold levels, the Treaty principles of proportionality, transparency, non-discrimination etc. apply where there is the potential for cross-border interest. Under national rules, all contracts for works and works-related services over €50,000 and over €25,000 for supplies and general services must be advertised on the national public procurement website www.etenders.gov.ie. Contracts below these thresholds, should be awarded on the basis of a competitive process of direct invitation to an adequate number of suitable suppliers.

The eTenders website is for use by the wider public sector including semi-state bodies, both commercial and non-commercial. Voluntary and community groups which are publicly funded are also entitled to use the site for their procurement activity. Registration on eTenders is free and there is no charge to submit a tender. Contractors can register as a 'Supplier' on the eTenders system. As part of the registration process a contractor should select the Common Procurement Vocabulary (CPV) codes that describe the type of works that they are interested in tendering for. This will ensure that they receive an automatic notification email alert when contracting authorities publish contract notices on eTenders for public works of a type that they select. The form for eTenders supplier registration can be found at <https://irl.eu-supply.com/ctm/Company/CompanyRegistration/RegisterCompany>.

Where tenders are invited in this manner it is incumbent on contracting authorities to ensure that those who are awarded public contracts have the financial standing and technical capacity to complete the works in a safe and timely manner.

Bodies procuring public works projects must comply with the provisions of the CWMF which contains extensive guidance covering all aspects of the procurement and contract administration stages. Specific guidance and templates are also published to manage the pre-qualification stage of a procurement process. It is important, when assessing the financial standing and technical capacity of a contractor to undertake a particular project, that the contracting authority should set standards that are proportionate to the project and its associated risks.

To provide targeted assistance to contracting authorities on this important stage of the procurement process guidance note GN 2.3.1.3 - Minimum Standards for Suitability Works Contractor Criteria (Open, Restricted Procedure) was first published on 6 October 2010.

This guidance note sets out standards under each of the criteria that may be used to assess a contractor's financial standing and technical ability. The guidance was developed in consultation with industry at a point where the recession had commenced and took into account reduced capacity generally. The guidance was revised in May 2013, primarily to reflect changes in the requirements for performance bonds on public works projects.

Turnover represents a reasonable indicator of the capacity of a contractor to deliver projects of a particular scale. Construction projects require main contractors to manage a significant supply chain and where turnover is lower than recommended levels contracting authorities are entitled to have legitimate concerns over the capacity of a contractor to deliver the project in question.

Guidance note GN 2.3.1.3 (page 11) states that, for building projects, turnover should be set within a range of 75 – 150% of the annualised turnover of the capital value of the contract which is the capital value of the project divided by the number of years over which the expenditure will occur. For a straightforward building project of 2 years duration with a capital value of €4m the turnover sought can be as low as €1.5m. For general civil engineering projects this is reduced to 30 – 60% but rises to 200 – 300% of the annualised turnover of the capital value for complex civil engineering rail projects.

The 2014 procurement directives set a cap on the level of turnover at a maximum of two times the estimated contract value except in duly justified cases. The ranges set out above result in turnover levels that are well below this cap with the exception of the range specified for complex rail projects which, because of their exceptionally high risk, is justified.

Flood Prevention Measures

199. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the person or body responsible for cleaning debris accumulated in a river (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35820/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Office of Public Works (OPW) is responsible for the maintenance of Arterial Drainage Schemes and catchment drainage schemes designated under the Arterial Drainage Acts of 1945 and 1995. As the channel referred to does not form part of an Arterial Drainage Scheme the OPW has no responsibility for its maintenance.

Local flooding issues are a matter, in the first instance, for each local authority to investigate and address. It is open to all Local Authorities to submit a funding application to the OPW under its Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme. The Scheme's eligibility criteria, including a requirement that measures are cost beneficial, is published on the OPW website, www.opw.ie.

The OPW consider each application in accordance with the scheme's eligibility criteria and having regard to the overall availability of resources for flood risk management.

State Properties

200. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans for a building (details supplied) in County Kildare. [35956/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The OPW's policy with regard to non-operational (vacant) State property including the former Garda station, Rathangan, Co. Kildare is to:

1. Identify if the property is required/suitable for alternative State use by either Government departments or the wider public sector.

2. If there is no other State use identified for a property, the OPW will then consider disposing of the property on the open market if and when conditions prevail, in order to generate revenue for the Exchequer.

3. If no State requirement is identified or if a decision is taken not to dispose of a particular property, the OPW may consider community involvement (subject to detailed written submission, which would indicate that the community/voluntary group has the means to insure, maintain and manage the property and that there are no ongoing costs for the Exchequer).

I am advised by the Commissioners of Public Works that a decision has been taken to dispose of this property. The Contract for Sale is currently being prepared and it is hoped to dispose of the property in 2018.

Construction Contracts

201. **Deputy Seán Canney** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the measures he will put in place to protect subcontractors who are owed moneys on public work contracts but cannot get paid in view of the unprecedented number of building contractors going out of business in the recent past. [36124/18]

202. **Deputy Seán Canney** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if public works contracts will be amended to provide better protection for subcontractors in terms of payments. [36125/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 201 and 202 together.

The conditions of most construction contracts in use between construction clients and building contractors in both the public and private sectors require that payments are made at defined intervals and that payment is contingent on work being completed to a pre-determined standard. There is usually no contractual obligation on the main contractor to make payments to sub-contractors because this is left to the commercial arrangements that are contained in their respective contracts.

Poor payment practices prevalent in the construction industry prompted Senator Feargal Quinn to table a legislative response in the form of the Construction Contracts Bill which was initiated in Seanad Éireann in May 2010 as a Private Member's Bill. Analysis undertaken during the development of the Bill highlighted the liberties that were taken by some in the absence of a structure to determine payments down the supply chain.

The Bill received Government and industry support and was enacted in 2013, it applies to all contracts entered into after 25 July 2016. The Construction Contracts Act imposes minimum payment requirements and provides the necessary tools to enforce those payments between the main contractor and their sub-contractors and so on down the supply chain. It applies to all construction contracts (as defined in the Act), public or private sector, whether they are written or oral and whether they include payment provisions or not.

The provisions of the Act include:

- a maximum payment interval of 30 days and a requirement to honour payment requests within 30 days for sub-contractors;
- a right to suspension for non-payment;

- a right to refer a payment dispute to adjudication; and

- the prohibition of arrangements that make entitlement to payment conditional on certain events, (e.g. 'pay when paid' clauses, which delay payments until the payer has, in turn, been paid), which were prevalent in most forms of sub-contract.

The public works contracts were amended prior to its commencement in June 2016 to accommodate the requirements of the Act and to facilitate cashflow in accordance with the payment terms imposed on main contractors with respect to their sub-contractors.

Whilst much of the interest from industry surrounding the Act was centred on the introduction of adjudication, it is the discipline that the legislation imposes on payments that appears to be largely ignored. Arguably these are the most important provisions in the Act but sub-contractors must be proactive in enforcing their entitlements with the contractor for payments that are due.

The Act does not cut across the normal rules for company liquidation/receivership and so where this arises there is no avenue for recovery from the insolvent party. However the magnitude of the exposure that many sub-contractors currently face upon the insolvency of a contractor would not arise if the provision for payments were insisted upon and the remedies available were exercised where payment is not forthcoming.

It is unacceptable that sub-contractors are suffering losses as a result of the insolvency of a contractor on a construction project. It is all the more galling when it arises on a public works project since the State pays what is owed under its contracts. However the issue raised would suggest that sub-contractors are not exercising the rights provided for in the Act which is surprising given the welcome it received by all contracting tiers in the industry and indeed the support it received from members of both Houses of the Oireachtas.

The Construction Contracts Adjudication Service in the Department of Business, Enterprise & Innovation has responsibility for matters in relation to the implementation of the Construction Contracts Act, 2013. The Chairperson of the Ministerial Panel of Adjudicators submitted the first Annual Report on the implementation of the Construction Contracts Act, 2013 to the Minister of State with responsibility for the Act, Mr Pat Breen TD, which covers the period from the 26th July 2016 to 25th July 2017. A link to the report follows. <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/Publications/First-Annual-Report-implementation-Construction-Contracts-Act.html>

Departmental Properties

203. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the annual rental cost of buildings rented by his Department or organisations under its aegis at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36433/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The annual rental costs incurred by the Commissioners of Public Works for buildings leased in Portlaoise for various Government Departments and their agencies amount to €919,790.

The Commissioners are not in a position to provide information on buildings that other Departments may have leased themselves directly from a Landlord.

Public Sector Staff Recruitment

204. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the criteria and policy for awarding progression up a salary scale for a new entrant to the civil and public service who enters from the private sector, has relevant experience and is seeking to commence on a point higher than point one of the scale will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35556/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In December 2010, along with other measures taken to reduce expenditure in order to stabilise public finances it was decided that all appointments through open competitions would be made at the minimum of the scale. These measures are reflected in the rules governing recruitment competitions and the literature provided to candidates.

Where a Secretary General or Head of a Department or Office is of the view that exceptional circumstances justify a starting point above the minimum, the specific sanction of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform should be sought in advance of any offer being made and on the basis of a business case. Clearly any widespread relaxation of the current policy would have implications for the sustainability of the public service pay bill.

Pension Provisions

205. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the 1% pay increase which is referenced in Parliamentary Question No. 194 of 27 February 2018 has been applied entirely to all qualifying pensions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35686/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will appreciate, I have administrative responsibility for the Civil Service Pension Schemes and I exercise a central policy/authorisation role in relation to all other public service pension schemes. Insofar as pension increases are concerned, the main function of my Department is to determine, subject to appropriate Ministerial and Government approval, the pensions increase policy to apply, and to issue Circulars to Departments and public service bodies to authorise and give guidance on the application of the relevant increases. It is then a matter for each pension paying authority to ensure that effect is given to the pension increases authorised in the relevant Circulars, in the present instance, those set out in Circular 02/2018.

The principle of pay parity underlies the pension increases sanctioned in this Circular. This means that pay increases, agreed as part of the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 (PSSA), are to be passed on to pension recipients to bring the salary on which their pension is based up to the current salary of those still serving after the pay increases are applied. It is important to note that not all pension recipients will be due these increases. This is because of protections in place (known as ‘grace periods’) for public servants retiring after the application of pay cuts under the FEMPI legislation, whereby their pensions were calculated using the higher pay rates that were in effect prior to the application of the pay cuts.

The administrative procedures for applying pay parity to pensions in payment, both in general and in the particular case of Circular 02/2018, are not straightforward. They require an examination of the salary on which an individual’s pension was based and the salary of those still serving in the same grade and on the same payscale point after the pay increase is applied, which I am advised is largely a manual process. The grace periods to which I refer above, a valuable protection for the pension entitlements of the public servants concerned, inevitably impose an additional hurdle to be addressed in the application of pension increases.

The Deputy will appreciate that the procedures I have described are inevitably complex and time-consuming, and that, as a result, not all pension increases will be capable of being paid on any one fixed date.

As I mentioned in my earlier response, responsibility for implementing the increases, within the context of the administrative issues I have outlined above, lies with the various public service pension/payroll providers. I understand that work is underway to apply the 1 January 2018 pay increase, the first pension increase sanctioned in Circular 02/2018, to those qualifying pensions in payment that have not yet benefited from that increase, and that this will include the calculation and payment of arrears backdated as appropriate.

Public Procurement Contracts Data

206. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number and percentage of SMEs' share of above threshold public contracts in the past 10 and 20 years, respectively under EU directive supplies and service contracts valued at €134,000 or €207,000 for public sector entities outside central government. [35696/18]

207. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number and percentage of SMEs' share of below threshold public contracts in the past ten and 20 years, respectively. [35697/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 206 and 207 together.

Procurement is key priority for Government and has undergone significant reform aimed at ensuring the sustainable delivery of much needed public services while also encouraging and supporting SME participation in these business opportunities. This approach is beneficial for the State because it nurtures competition which ensures value for money is maintained and provides SME with a platform to take advantage of similar opportunities in Ireland and across the European Union.

Specifically, the Office of Government Procurement have developed a suite of measures (circular 10/14) aimed at assisting SMEs to access public procurement opportunities. These include:

- Proportionate financial capacity criterion (turnover requirements limited to twice contract value);
- Contracting Authorities are encouraged to divide public contracts into lots;
- Provision for "consortia bidding" to assist SMEs to participate in procurement procedures where they would not have the relevant capability or scale;
- Public bodies are required to advertise contracts for goods and services valued above €25,000 on the national eTenders portal.

In addition, my colleague, Minister of State Patrick O'Donovan, who has responsibility for public procurement, chairs quarterly meetings of an SME Advisory Group, ensuring that the voice of Irish SMEs (including ISME, IBEC, SFA, Chambers Ireland, and CIF) is heard by Government.

SMEs are also encouraged to register on the Government's eTenders portal. Suppliers that are registered and have expressed an interest in similar business opportunities will receive au-

omatic notification when new opportunities arise.

The OGP proactively engages with the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, Inter-Trade Ireland and Enterprise Ireland to promote SME access to public procurement. The OGP participate at “Go-2-Tender” workshops and “Meet the Buyer” events which are also designed to help SMEs.

A SME Communication Strategy sub-group, chaired by the OGP, was established in 2017 as a joint venture with the industry representative bodies. This further promotes awareness of potential opportunities and supports available for SMEs in tendering for public contracts. A series of information videos explaining specific public procurement topics, along with case studies of SMEs who have won government contracts, was launched by Minister of State O’Donovan earlier this year. A series of focused and targeted breakfast briefings have also been scheduled around the country in conjunction with Inter-Trade Ireland and the SME Advisory Group partners.

Currently, data on the award of public contracts does not generally capture the size of businesses that are successful. However, analysis carried and published by the Office of Government Procurement (OGP) in the “Public Service Spend and Tendering Analysis for 2015” indicates that 94% of government procurement expenditure analysed falls within the State. This was based on an analysis of €4.535 billion expenditure across 86 large public service bodies. Other key findings show that the majority of spend analysed is with SMEs. 76% of tender notices are smaller value (below OJEU threshold) tenders. The median contract value of 2015 tender notices is less than or equal to €100k in 12 of the 16 procurement spend categories. This would indicate that government contracts in Ireland are accessible to SMEs given the low median size of published estimated contract values.

The OGP will continue to proactively engage with business and strive to enhance the significant measures already in place to support SME access to public procurement opportunities.

Office of Public Works Projects

208. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the role the OPW will undertake during the Papal visit to the Phoenix Park; the way in which security and logistics will be handled; if the OPW has contracted and-or sub-contracted event planning, equipment hire and security barriers to a private company; if so, the companies engaged; the cost of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35736/18]

221. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the OPW’s estimated attendance figures at the recent Papal mass in the Phoenix Park; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36862/18]

222. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the cost of the recent Papal visit; the estimated economic benefit of the visit; the estimated economic impact of the significant travel restrictions imposed on Dublin city during the visit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36863/18]

232. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the costs to the Office of Public Works of hosting the Papal visit in the Phoenix Park; if his officials have carried out an evaluation of the impact on the flora and fauna in the park, adjacent local residents and users of the park; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36968/18]

233. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the cost

of reinstating the Phoenix Park after the Papal visit; when this will be complete; the fees that were charged to the event organisers; the contractors employed; the estimated attendance at the event; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36985/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 208, 221, 222, 232 and 233 together.

At the request of the Government, the Office of Public Works implemented an overarching Papal Visit Management Plan in conjunction with the World Meeting of Families. The primary objective was to ensure the health, safety and welfare of all participants, attendees and staff.

The Office of Public Works managed the safety and logistics aspects of the visit in conjunction with An Garda Síochána.

Event Planning, equipment hire and the provision of security barriers was contracted through the OPW Event Management Services Procurement Framework. Under this Framework the following companies provided services:

- Actavo
- Arcana
- Catapult
- Eamon O'Boyle & Associates
- Pulse Security Management Ltd
- Eventsec

The final cost in this regard is not available as yet. However, I can advise that €4.9million has been paid to date.

The Estimated attendance at the Papal Mass in the Phoenix Park was 150,000 people.

The overall final cost of the Papal Visit is not available as yet. Although the visit is over, the OPW continues to work on the logistical arrangements which includes the de-rig, reinstatement and post-event administration for venues and locations associated with the visit including Aras an Uachtaráin, Dublin Castle, the Papal City Route, the Pro Cathedral, Capuchin Day Centre, Ireland West Airport, Knock Shrine, Phoenix Park, Media Centre Dublin Castle, Media Centre Phoenix Park, Media Centre Ireland West Airport, Media Centre Knock Shrine, Papal Visit Control Room - Dublin Castle.

OPW does not have any information in relation to the estimated economic benefit of the visit or the estimated economic impact on traffic restrictions on Dublin City during the visit.

OPW worked closely with all the agencies involved in the Papal Mass event to minimise the impact on the flora and fauna in the Phoenix Park. While some localised ground compaction occurred, as would be expected with an event of this scale, the overall effect on the flora and fauna of the Park was negligible.

With a view to minimising the impact of the event in the Phoenix Park on local residents and regular Park users, OPW implemented the following measures:

- Engaged dedicated Business and Community Liaison team.
- 26 July - 200 A4 Flyers and business cards distributed to City centre businesses.

7 September 2018

- 8 and 9 August - Business Briefings in Printworks Dublin Castle. Attended by 140 businesses.

- 4 and 5 August - 400 x A3 full colour posters distributed. Advance Notification of Community Briefing in The Castleknock Hotel.

- 10 August - Community Briefing at The Castleknock Hotel. Attended by 120 people.

- 14 - 21 August – An Post mail distribution of 144,000 booklets containing list of road closures, ‘Dear Community’ letter and contact information. These were delivered to residents and businesses in the City to advise them of restrictions in place that may impact them in advance of and during the Papal Visit. Copies of the booklet were also available from Dublin City Council, Dublin Town Kiosks, local Garda stations and from the OPW offices in Phoenix Park.

- 18 and 19 August - 60 x A3 full colour posters distributed in Smithfield, Stoneybatter and Navan Road areas re forthcoming community briefing.

- 20 August - 130 businesses and residents attended Community Briefing in Parish Hall, Prussia Street, Stoneybatter, D.7

- 20 - 27 August – Dedicated Papal Visit Helpline live in Dublin City Council.

- 23 August - 4,900 full colour A4 double-sided leaflets delivered to each of the seven designated pedestrian routes giving advance notification to residents and businesses of the large numbers of pedestrians expected to walk along these roads and the suspension of parking on their roads.

As described above, the process of de-rig, dismantling and removal of event infrastructure is ongoing in the Park and until complete, a costing for reinstatement of the Park cannot be provided. It is expected that these costs will be minimal. It is also expected that reinstatement works will be completed by the end of the year.

The organiser of the Papal Visit was the World Meeting of Families. No fees were charged.

In addition to the deployment of its own direct labour resources, the following contractors were engaged by the OPW in the Phoenix Park in relation to the Papal Visit:

- Actavo

- Ailesbury Ltd

- Catapult

- ETAV Ltd

- Eventus Ltd

- Total Event Hire

- Mongey Communications (Clardex Systems t/a Mongey Communications)

- Eventsec

- With Taste

- King Tree Services

- Garrido Limited

- Shaw Tree Services
- Darwin's Tree Services
- Peter O'Brien & Sons Landscapes
- Fleming & Co Signs
- Celtic Roadsweepers
- CFA Construction
- Conex Civil Engineering
- McLoughlin Line Marking Ltd
- Des Byrne Painting Contractors
- MC Decorators Ltd
- GMC Civil Engineering
- MP Decorators Ltd
- Draintech
- CSI Cleaning Services
- SDS Traffic Management Services
- Bill Kearney
- BirdWatch Ireland.

Community Employment Schemes Supervisors

209. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of pension entitlements for community employment supervisors; if further meetings of the community sector high level forum to discuss same are planned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35780/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy is aware, an issue which has been under discussion by the Community Sector High Level Forum relates to community employment supervisors and assistant supervisors who have been seeking, through their union representatives, the allocation of Exchequer funding to implement a Labour Court recommendation relating to the provision of a pension scheme.

Arrangements for future meetings of the forum will require discussion between the parties.

It continues to be the position that state organisations are not the employer of the particular employees concerned and that it is not possible for the State to provide funding for such a scheme. The employees in question are, or were, employees of private companies notwithstanding the fact that the companies concerned are, or were, reliant on State funding.

National Monuments

210. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when a monument (details supplied) in County Kerry will open to the public; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35796/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am pleased to confirm that Garfinny Bridge was opened to the public in early August. The fencing panels had remained in place for a period after the main works to Garfinny Bridge were completed. This was necessary as part of the site had been landscaped and re-seeded and there was a requirement to protect that area from pedestrian traffic for a period.

Office of Public Works Properties

211. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the details of discussions with a county council (details supplied) in respect of its property at a location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35807/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The OPW made a submission on 4 May 2018 (at the link) to Laois County Council in relation to a Draft Portlaoise Local Area Plan 2018-2024 and zoning requirements for this site.

Arups, who were commissioned by Laois County Council to develop a Masterplan for the Togher Area, contacted OPW on the 7th June 2018 to enquire if there was any further information that OPW could provide regarding OPW's current plans for the site. OPW confirmed that it was only at the initial stage of preparing a master plan that would allow full flexibility on the future potential uses of the lands owned by the State at Knockmay, Portlaoise, Co. Laois. OPW also confirmed that no decision had been made as to the specific uses that will be accommodated on the site.

At present, as already indicated in PQ 33673/18, no decision has been made as to the specific uses that will be accommodated on the site and the masterplan is still in very early development stage.

[Draft Portlaoise Local Area Plan 2018-2024]

Defence Forces Pensions

212. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of appeals made by spouses of deceased members of the Defence Forces since 2000 against initial rulings that the spouses concerned were ineligible for pensions under the Defence Forces spouses' and children's contributory pension schemes since the limited appeals process was introduced in 2000; the number of such appeals that were upheld; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35868/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): By way of background, and for the Deputy's information, it is important to note that at the time of the original introduction of spouses' and children's contributory pension ('S&C') schemes for male public servants and their subsequent extension to include female public servants, membership of the schemes was made automatic for new entrants, and optional for those who were in service at the time.

Revised S&C schemes introduced from 1984 onwards to cover a wider class of beneficiaries than in the original schemes, subject to more restrictive refund of contribution conditions, were applied automatically to new entrants while an option to join was made available to serving staff.

For a variety of reasons (including personal reasons), a number of serving public servants, both male and female, declined to join the revised and/or original S&C schemes. This was not confined to the Defence Forces, but was a public service-wide phenomenon.

The Commission on Public Service Pensions Pension in its Final Report (2000) examined a range of submissions that sought a new option to join the schemes but recommended against opening a further general membership option across the public service as a whole. The Commission was concerned about the major additional costs which a new option would impose, given that it would almost certainly be availed of by those who would either have an immediate entitlement or a high expectation of benefit at a later stage. A further option, the Commission argued, would weaken the integrity of the schemes, would lead to pressure for individuals to be permitted to enter and leave at will, and could undermine fundamentally the financing of the schemes, which operate on the insurance principle, i.e. that not everyone benefits.

However, the Pension Commission accepted that in a number of cases, perceptions of injustice might have arisen as a result of the exercise of past options not to join S&C schemes. For that reason, it recommended that a limited appeals process for scheme membership options be established to examine individual cases and to allow appeals that met any one of the following criteria:

‘(i) where there is no evidence that an option was provided to the individual public servant in the first place;

(ii) where there is medical evidence to indicate that the person making the decision not to join the scheme was of sufficiently unsound mind not to appreciate the consequences of his or her decision;

(iii) where a member of the original scheme declined to join the revised scheme in circumstances where there would have been no reasonably foreseeable adverse financial consequences for the individual (in terms only of his or her scheme contributions) had he or she instead opted to join the revised scheme.’

A comprehensive framework for addressing outstanding Pension Commission recommendations was agreed by a joint management-union Working Group and subsequently approved by the Government in 2004. Since then, the criteria recommended by the Pension Commission have been used in considering S&C scheme membership option appeals.

My information is that five appeal cases have been submitted to my Department under the Pension Commission limited appeals mechanism by the Department of Defence on behalf of spouses (or children) of deceased members of the Defence Forces, and that all five have been allowed, subject to complying with all of the requirements regarding qualification and payment of a spouse’s pension and children’s pensions under the relevant scheme rules, including the payment of any relevant outstanding member contributions.

I am satisfied with the operation of the S&C scheme membership option appeals mechanism. I consider that it is consistent with the Pension Commission’s analysis and recommendations on the issues involved (as I have outlined them above), and that both of these remain valid today.

Flood Prevention Measures

213. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if a matter (details supplied) will be addressed at lands following previous works to address flooding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36043/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The River Maine is one of the rivers that is part of the OPW's programme of maintenance of arterial drainage scheme completed by it under the Arterial Drainage Act, 1945.

In 2014 following the extreme and repeated storm surges experienced on the River Maine estuary, the OPW repaired a breached embankment at the location referred to by Deputy Neville. The works involved constructing a reinforced access haul road down to the flood defence embankment and constructing a new flood defence to replace the breached defence.

While the OPW is not aware of any breached flood defence at this location at present I have asked the regional engineers to keep the defences referred to by the Deputy under review and to address any breaches in a timely manner.

Office of Public Works Expenditure

214. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if a licence fee was paid to a company (details supplied) for the use of its copyrighted material in view of the fact that this material was included on a map distributed to households in Dublin without attribution being included on the map. [36144/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): No license fee was paid by The Office of Public Works for the material referred to by the Deputy.

Public Service Pay Commission Reports

215. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when the report on the Public Service Pay Commission will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36379/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Public Service Pay Commission published its second report on Tuesday the 4th of September.

The Public Service Pay Commission was tasked under the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 to conduct a comprehensive examination of underlying difficulties in recruitment and retention of staff in the public service. The Commission adopted a modular approach to its work and the report published reflects a comprehensive examination of recruitment and retention issues in relation to the grades of Medical Consultants, Non Consultant Hospital Doctors and Nurses and Midwives in the health service. Further considerations and work by the Commission on recruitment and retention issues will address other grades and sectors of the public service.

I welcomed the report. There are many viewpoints on the issues confronting our health services. That is why the independent evidence-based analysis of recruitment and retention provided by the Commission in this Report is so important.

I understand there is a commitment between public service employers and staff representa-

tives to meet within four weeks of to discuss issues around implementation of the Report. It is important that this agreed process is adhered to and that space is afforded to the parties to reflect on the detail in this Report and engage in that process.

The Commission will be making all of its submissions and inputs and the Report publicly available on its website, www.paycommission.gov.ie.

Departmental Communications

216. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the positions in his Department and the organisations under its aegis that have arrangements in place for lo-call numbers or 1800, 1850 and 1890 telephone numbers for members of the public to contact his Department or organisations under its aegis; the number of these that are completely free to call for persons who use mobile telephones and may incur major bills telephoning such organisations; if the situation will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36404/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In response to the Deputy, I can confirm that an 1890 lo-call phone number, in addition to a landline phone number, is available for members of the public to contact my Department. The lo-call number is available in my Department's Quality Customer Service Charter.

The 1890 number provided will incur a cost to persons calling my Department using a mobile phone, the cost of which is dependent and determined by the mobile operator used. This is highlighted when the number is made available.

More generally, a review is underway by ComReg to examine ways of reducing costs incurred by members of the public when contacting Government Departments, with consideration given to a number of possible alternatives. A final decision on this review is expected by the end of the year.

Delivery of an effective and quality customer service is a priority for my Department. Officials in my Department will review ComReg's final decision with a view to identifying the cheapest way of contacting the Department from anywhere in the country.

Taking the cost implications for mobile phone users into account my Department developed an alternate solution to reduce the cost to both the public and public bodies by the use of 076 numbers. The 076 numbers are designated as a non-geographic landline which means calls will be charged as a national call from all landlines and are part of the ComReg review.

The following table provides details of the lo-call numbers currently available in my Department and the bodies under the aegis of my Department.

Public Body	No. of lines	LoCall Number
Department of Public Expenditure and Reform	1	1890
Office of Public Works	4	1890
Office of Public Works	1	1850
Public Appointment Service	1	1890
Office of the Ombudsman*	3	1890
Economic and Social Research Institute**	2	1800

The OPW advise that the different freefone/lo-call services can be defined as follows:

- Callsave 1850: Allows Callers to contact Service Providers at a fixed rate per call only from landlines. After a specified duration the OPW pays the balance on a per second basis.

- Lo-Call 1890: Allows Callers to contact Service Providers at local rates for the full duration of call. The OPW pays the balance. The call is charged at a local call rate these calls are generally in bundle with all carriers. In relation to mobiles this is defined by the mobile carrier the caller is with and the package they have, the mobile carrier determines the actual charge.

* The 3 lo-call numbers include the Office of the Ombudsman, the Office of the Commissioner for Environmental Information and the Referendum Commission

** There are two lo-call numbers available that provide for calls to be made free of charge to the caller. These Freephone numbers are available relation to the ESRI's Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) Survey.

Pension Provisions

217. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the reason a pension is not being issued to a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; when the pension will issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36465/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I have been informed that when the individual in question retired from the public service, on examination of the pension documentation that he submitted, his employer became aware that he had been in receipt of a public service pension in respect of earlier service in the Defence Forces.

In light of this information, the employer determined that it was necessary to examine the individual's entitlement in light of Section 52 (6) and (7) of the Public Service Pensions (Single Scheme and Other Provisions) Act 2012, which impose an overall cap on the years of service that can be taken into account when calculating a public servant's pension entitlements across all public service employments.

I understand that the employer delayed payment of the pension pending clarification on the matter. My officials are in the course of communicating with the employer with the purpose of ensuring that the individual's pension entitlements can be processed as soon as possible.

Flood Prevention Measures

218. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the level of progress with channel draining in rivers in Mountmellick, County Laois; and the progress of the capital scheme for flood defences. [36608/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised that the watercourses in and in the vicinity of Mountmellick are part of the River Barrow Drainage District which the local authority has a statutory duty to maintain. There are no Arterial Drainage Scheme channels in the Barrow River Basin for which the Office of Public Works (OPW) is responsible.

Laois County Council (LCC) has confirmed that maintenance works commenced on the River Owenass in Mountmellick following the most recent flood event, and the following is a

summary of these works:

- Irishtown Bridge on the N80 has had silt and vegetation removed from the eye of the bridge improving capacity and conveyance

- At the Convent Bridge on the R422 the third eye has been cleaned and both the upstream and downstream approaches have had vegetation and silt build up removed.

- Works are ongoing on the stretch of river between the above-mentioned bridges, involving the clearing of vegetation (taking advantage of the current low water level) with tree/limb cutting to commence in the week beginning 10 September, 2018 to remove any potential impediments in the channel. Once vegetation is cleared, it is anticipated that bank repairs will be necessary where slippages are evident.

- Any fallen trees and potential debris blockages have been removed when observed or upon notification of same.

- Cleaning of a number of feeder drains/streams to the Owenass and Barrow have taken place with further works planned throughout this month.

In relation to the progress of the capital flood relief scheme, I can confirm that in February 2018 the OPW and LCC agreed to prioritise progression of a flood relief scheme for Mountmellick, following severe flooding in November 2017.

A Project Steering Group has been established comprising engineering and administrative staff from both the OPW and LCC. The Steering Group has commenced preparatory work on the project including a review of the flood information available in the local area and potential solutions identified in the Flood Risk Management Plans.

The Steering Group's current priority is to finalise briefs for the engagement of engineering and environmental consultants. It is anticipated that consultants will be appointed and join the Steering Group in Quarter 4 2018 and work on the detailed design of the proposed scheme will then commence. Details regarding the programme and costs of the proposed works will become clearer following the appointment of consultants.

Heritage Sites

219. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the arrangements being made to accommodate tourist access to a historical site (details supplied) in view of the recent retirement of the keyholder; and if the OPW will work constructively with a local tourism group with regard to same. [36713/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Office of Public Works is anxious to restore public access to this important Heritage site following the retirement of the previous Keyholder / Caretaker earlier this year and have been attempting to identify a viable local alternative solution to manage the access to the site. To date however, no proposals have emerged locally which are consistent with the OPW's need to be assured that there will be firm control over the access arrangements which will protect the Monument.

Currently, OPW is engaging with both the Kells and District Tourism Network and Meath Co. Council and a positive outcome on a partnership basis is anticipated.

Heritage Sites

220. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the list of heritage sites open to the public by the public having to borrow a key from a neighbour to the site. [36834/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Office of Public Works manages visitor access to Heritage sites in its care throughout Ireland in a variety of ways.

Seventy sites are manned by Guide staff and are open to the public on either a fulltime or seasonal basis and include some of the most prominent tourist locations nationally such as Newgrange, Rock of Cashel, Kilmainham Gaol etc.

A significant number of other locations are managed separately with the assistance of Care-takers or Keyholders employed locally and usually residing near to the sites. These individuals perform a variety of services including light cleaning and litter removal, management of daily gate opening/unlocking for general open access sites and liaison with OPW management in relation to small maintenance needs, fault reporting etc. Within this cohort, some sites are opened to the public by means of a specific Keyholding arrangement whereby visitors are enabled to call on a specified person locally who will make the key to the site available to them for the purposes of a visit. This allows the OPW to facilitate access to the site for visitors but to retain essential control and combat any unauthorised person from getting admittance and causing damage or engaging in antisocial behaviour.

A list of the properties in the final category is being compiled and will be forwarded to the Deputy separately.

Questions Nos. 221 and 222 answered with Question No. 208.

Flood Risk Management

223. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of proposals for a voluntary home relocation scheme for domestic dwellings affected by flooding and unable to receive insurance cover or adequate remedial works; the number of homes due to be covered by the scheme; the amount due to be allocated; the timeframe of the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36885/18]

224. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the amount spent on strategic maintenance works on the River Shannon in 2017 and to date in 2018. [36886/18]

225. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the trial on lowering water levels in Lough Allen undertaken by a group (details supplied); if there are legal or statutory impediments to such measures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36888/18]

226. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of meetings held by the interdepartmental flood policy co-ordination group in 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36889/18]

227. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the establishment and operation of the national flood forecasting and warning service unit; the number of staff employed in the unit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36890/18]

228. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of meetings held by the River Shannon co-ordination group in 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36891/18]

229. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the amount of funding set aside for the pilot scheme of individual home protection measures; the amount of funding drawn down; the timeframe for a decision on the future of the pilot scheme's national roll-out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36892/18]

231. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the Office of Public Works' work on riparian rights landowners' legal obligations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36896/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 223 to 229, inclusive, and 231 together.

Home relocation

On April 11th 2017, the Government agreed the administrative arrangements for a once-off Voluntary Homeowners Relocation Scheme for those primary residential properties that flooded between, or as a result of flooding between 4th December, 2015 and 13th January, 2016. This is a national scheme of humanitarian assistance, targeting aid at those worst affected properties, for which there are no alternative feasible measures.

The Government decision confirmed that a homeowner had to meet a number of conditions to be eligible for assistance under this scheme, including:

- That floodwater entered and damaged the building during the relevant dates such as to render it uninhabitable.

- That the property was the homeowner's primary residence at the time of the floods.

- That the affected property must have a significant probability of the recurrence of the flood depth, duration or frequency on a scale that could cause further serious and similar damage to the home.

- That the property is not due to or may not benefit from a planned or possible future major, minor or individual flood defence scheme.

- That the property may not be protected adequately from being flooded in the future, at an economically feasible cost, through other flood mitigation works including minor works, individual property protection or other possible measures that can be considered at this time.

- That the homeowner is unable to obtain flood risk insurance.

At this time, in relation to those homeowners being considered under the scheme, the OPW is continuing to work with each of the Local Authorities. To date:

- 43 homeowners have been met in relation to the scheme and in June of this year, 36 of these homeowners were invited to apply for the next stage that includes a site inspection,

- 43 homes have been approved or are being considered by the Local Authorities for remedial works, to provide an engineering solution to their property,

- 58 homes did not meet the criteria for the scheme.

The numbers of homes within the process are changing regularly as homeowners make

contact with the OPW and as assessments are completed.

The OPW has budgeted up to €3m this year for the potential costs associated with this scheme.

Shannon Group & Lake Levels

The Shannon Flood Risk State Agency Co-ordination Working Group met on six occasions in 2016. During 2016, the primary focus of the Group was to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the various agencies and set out a Work Programme. In 2017, a number of sub-committees were established in accordance with the Group's Terms of Reference to progress the delivery of initiatives agreed by the Group. The Group met formally twice in 2017 with sub-committee and other bilateral meetings taking place more frequently as required. The Group has met once this year with another meeting scheduled for October.

Information about the Group is available on the OPW website, www.opw.ie.

The Group took a decision in October 2016 to trial the lowering of the lake levels on Lough Allen, within the existing statutory framework, during the Winter 2016/2017 to help mitigate potential flood risk. A protocol was finalised between ESB, Waterways Ireland and the OPW to lower the late Autumn and Winter minimum lake levels in Lough Allen by approximately 0.7 metres with the first reduction implemented in October 2016. The trial was repeated for the Winter 2017/2018 and is being reviewed. The Group took a decision at its meeting in May to repeat the trial for this coming Winter, subject to the review.

The Group at its meeting on 2 December, 2016 took a major decision to develop a plan for a strategic maintenance programme on the River Shannon to halt the deterioration of the river channel. Planning for a strategic maintenance programme has been advanced during 2017 and 2018 and will be discussed by the Group at its meeting in October.

Interdepartmental Flood Policy Co-ordination Group

The Interdepartmental Flood Policy Coordination Group, that I chair, met twice in 2015, four times in 2016, once in 2017, once in 2018 to date with a further meeting scheduled for October. The most recent meeting was held on 7th February, 2018.

In November 2016, Government agreed an interim report from the Interdepartmental Flood Policy Coordination Group setting out progress on its work and making appropriate recommendations for consideration by Government. This report is available to view on the OPW website at <https://www.opw.ie/en/media/Interim-Report-Interdepartmental-Flood-Policy-Co-ordination-Group-final.pdf>.

Implementing the National Flood Risk Policy, launched with the Flood Risk Management Plans on 3 May 2018, provides an update of progress by the Group's implementation of the national flood risk policy. This report is available on www.floodinfo.ie

National Flood Forecasting & Warning Service

A Steering Group has been established to steer, support and oversee the establishment of a new National Flood Forecasting Service. The Steering Group has met on sixteen occasions to date, agreed a Terms of Reference and prepared and agreed an implementation plan comprising a number of phases, including an initial set-up phase and a development and trial phase. Work is now progressing on these phases.

The service will deal with flood forecasting from fluvial (river) and coastal sources. When

established it will involve the issuing of flood forecasts and general alerts.

Given the complexities involved in establishing, designing, developing and testing this new service, it is anticipated that it will take at least 5 years before it is fully operational and it is estimated it will require a staffing complement of 15 full time posts. To date, the following progress has been made including staff appointed:

- Met Éireann has appointed two staff members to date to the project.
- Met Éireann is in the process of recruiting Hydrometeorologists for its Flood Forecasting Centre.
- In April 2018, a contract was placed for a study of suitable catchment-based models and an assessment of integrator systems to be undertaken over an 18 month period.
- A Communications Working Group, reporting to the Steering Group, has been established to consider the communications needs of the service and has recently held its first meeting.

Individual Property Protection

The Interdepartmental Flood Policy Co-ordination Group this year is considering the potential costs and benefits associated with the introduction of an individual property protection scheme.

The Group is being informed by two different OPW funded pilot projects, in Thomastown and Graiguenamanagh in County Kilkenny and Crossmolina in County Mayo. The Co-ordination Group's work, when completed, will be submitted to Government for consideration in the context of the merits of the introduction by Government of any scheme to support individual property protection measures.

Following consideration of the consultant engineer's feasibility report on a potential IPP scheme, Kilkenny County Council, having noted the limitations of such measures and having regard to the adoption by the Council in June 2018 of the Flood Risk Management Plan for the Kilkenny area which includes proposals for permanent flood defence schemes for both Graiguenamanagh and Thomastown, has confirmed to the OPW that it does not now propose to progress the implementation of IPP measures for the two towns. The Council's preference is for permanent flood defence measures and it is now in correspondence and discussion with the OPW on the implementation of the proposed schemes for the two towns and other proposed flood defence schemes for County Kilkenny. Expenditure to date on the Kilkenny pilot scheme is €27,956 which relates to costs incurred for the commission of the feasibility report for the pilot.

Mayo County Council (MCC), in conjunction with the Office of Public Works (OPW) and the local Flood Action Group, have progressed a pilot project for the installation of flood gates for properties in Crossmolina. A survey of households in the town by MCC received expressions of interest from over 70 homeowners. OPW appointed consultants to undertake a survey of individual properties to determine their suitability for floodgates, and to make recommendations for each property. MCC procured a contractor to supply and install the floodgates based on the recommendations of the consultants. The OPW has provided some €237,000 in funding to date for this pilot with gates having now been installed in 67 properties in the town. Some property owners who originally expressed an interest in having gates installed have not responded to further communications from the consultant appointed by OPW. As a result, these properties are still awaiting gates.

Additionally, a review is ongoing as to whether further properties in Crossmolina might

benefit from the installation of gates.

Riparian Guidance

The OPW will be publishing on *www.flooding.ie* guidance to landowners in relation to the maintenance of watercourses on or near their lands in the context of managing flood risk. This website is undergoing a review and it is expected that an updated website with some guidance will be available before the end of this year.

Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme

230. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the minor works flood scheme review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36893/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As previously advised the review of the Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme was completed in June 2017.

All Local Authorities were notified of the revised criteria, which are effective for applications received after 1 June 2017. The revised criteria are available on *www.opw.ie*.

Question No. 231 answered with Question No. 223.

Questions Nos. 232 and 233 answered with Question No. 208.

School Transport Eligibility

234. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if school transport for a person (details supplied) will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36244/18]

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.

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 remotely from their nearest school.

In the 2017/18 school year over 117,000 children, including almost 12,000 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 4,500 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually at a total cost of almost €190 million in 2017.

Bus Éireann has advised that the child in question commenced on school transport on 03 September 2018.

The terms of the School Transport Scheme are applied equitably on a national basis.

Special Educational Needs Staff

235. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the situation regarding SNAs as outlined in correspondence in relation to the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35670/18]

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.

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.

School Staff

236. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a selection process has commenced for the appointment of a principal of a school (details supplied); if a principal has been appointed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35434/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Department approval is

given for the appointment of a Principal to all new schools from 1 September of the school year prior to the opening of a new school.

The recruitment and appointment of a Principal is a matter for the individual school authority.

Schools Refurbishment

237. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a design team has been appointed for the refurbishment and extension of a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35435/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that the project brief for the school in question has been finalised and furnished to the Patron who I understand has provided details directly to the school. The project will include the construction of additional classrooms and ancillary accommodation.

My Department will be in further contact with the school authority relating to the commencement of the architectural planning process which will include the appointment of a design team.

Schools Building Contractors

238. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the liquidation of a company (details supplied); the effect this has had on small businesses in the sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35450/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The company referred to by the Deputy entered examinership in April 2018 and was subsequently liquidated on 5 June 2018.

The Department of Education and Skills has been made aware of payment difficulties faced by a number of sub-contractors which had been engaged by the company under reference in respect of the Schools Bundle 5 PPP project and other non-PPP school projects.

This situation is very regrettable. However, it must be emphasised that the Department of Education and Skills is not, and was not, party to any contract with these sub-contractors. Their contractual relationship was with the company which is now in liquidation.

In the case of the Schools Bundle 5 PPP project, a replacement contractor has now been appointed by the PPP company. Sub-contractors of the company under reference have been encouraged, where possible, to avail of the opportunity presented to actively engage with the replacement contractor, in order to agree commercial terms for their re-engagement at the relevant school sites.

It is recognised that there have been wider problems in the construction industry with regard to non-payment of sub-contractors by main contractors for work undertaken. This is clearly unacceptable. The Construction Contracts Act was enacted in 2013 to address poor payment practices in the industry and applies to construction contracts entered into after 25 July 2016.

In order for the Construction Contracts Act to be effective, it is essential that sub-contractors fully exercise their rights under the legislation and access the remedies available. While the

Act does not cut across the rules for company insolvency proceedings, the magnitude of the exposure that many sub-contractors currently face upon the insolvency of a contractor would not arise if the provision for payments were insisted upon and the remedies available were exercised when payment was not forthcoming.

Schools Building Projects Status

239. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a design team will be appointed for the construction of a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35483/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The project to which the Deputy refers has been devolved for delivery to the local Education and Training Board (ETB). My Department gave approval to the ETB in June 2018 to proceed to appoint a Design Team for this project. It is a matter for the ETB to progress this appointment. That process is currently underway.

Schools Building Contractors

240. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of contractors that expressed an interest in tendering for the completion of a campus (details supplied) by the closing date of 23 July 2018; if it is still his plan to invite actual tenders for the contract on 4 September 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35484/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): KWETB received eight expressions of interest for the completion of the project to which the Deputy refers within the timeframe set for receipt of same. These expressions of interest will now inform the pre-qualification process that is underway. The project remains on target to issue tender documents to the relevant contractors on 8th November which is the date that had been identified in the agreed programme for completion of these projects.

Schools Building Contractors

241. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the preferred contractor for a school (details supplied) has responded to the letter of intent issued on 29 June 2018; if the letter of acceptance has issued; when construction will commence on the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35485/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school building project to which the Deputy refers is currently at construction stage. The Letter of Acceptance issued on Friday 17th August 2018 which commenced the school building contract. The contractor appointed is MEIC Limited.

Schools Building Projects Status

242. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has received the pre-qualification report from the design team in relation to a school (details supplied); when the preferred tenderer will be chosen; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35486/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The major building project referred to by the Deputy is currently at Stage 2(b) – Detailed Design.

This project was authorised to commence the Pre-Qualification of Contractors in April 2018.

The Design Team submitted a draft pre-qualification report on 25th July 2018 and the Department reverted with feedback on 13th August. The Design Team is currently in the process of addressing the Department's comments and will submit a revised draft pre-qualification report as soon as this exercise is complete.

When pre-qualification is complete and the design team's NZEB submission has been considered, this project will then be progressed to tender stage. A tender stage normally takes between 7 and 8 months to complete.

In February 2018 my Department issued a letter to the school and its Design Team outlining the projected timeframe for the progression of this project to tender stage and construction and the steps involved.

Schools Building Projects Status

243. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has received the pre-qualification report from the design team in relation to a school (details supplied); when a preferred tenderer will be chosen; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35487/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, the project to which she refers has been devolved for delivery to Kildare and Wicklow Education & Training Board (ETB).

The pre-qualification report from the Design Team is due to be completed and submitted to the ETB in mid October 2018. It is not possible to say at this stage when the preferred tenderer will be chosen.

School Patronage

244. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a decision has been made on an application by a school (details supplied) to become co-educational; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35488/18]

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

The application is being considered and my Department will be in further contact with the Patron as part of this process.

Site Acquisitions

245. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the required clarifications have been received from the vendor of the site for schools (details supplied); if satisfactory, if a design team will be appointed for both projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35489/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As indicated in my response to previous Parliamentary Questions, engagement with the vendor is ongoing in respect of outstanding clarifications regarding the proposed school site acquisition. Therefore, the appointment of a design team cannot be progressed yet but Department officials will work to do so as soon as it is possible.

Teaching Council of Ireland

246. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason there is no specific special education teacher category to register under the Teaching Council. [35544/18]

247. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a level 8 in Montessori from a college (details supplied) is recognised by the Teaching Council as a qualification to register as a special educational needs teacher under the category of Montessori and other but a level 8 in early years teaching and learning from Maynooth University and level 9 qualifications from both DCU and UCD specific to this category are not. [35545/18]

248. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the Teaching Council last reviewed the policies concerning the criteria that deems a person suitable to be a special education teacher. [35546/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 246 to 248, inclusive, together.

All initial teacher education programmes in Ireland that lead to registration must have professional accreditation from the Teaching Council. The Teaching Council's (Registration) Regulations 2016 set out the routes under which teachers are eligible to apply for registration. A degree in Early Childhood Teaching and Learning, while valuable, is not an accredited course nor does it meet the registration requirements under Route 4 Other of the Teaching Council Registration Regulations 2016 (formerly Regulation 3 Montessori and Other Categories of the 2009 Regulations).

Under the Council's criteria for initial teacher education (revised in March 2017), student teachers in all accredited programmes are required to undertake study in Inclusive Education (Special Education, Multiculturalism, Disadvantage, etc.) as mandatory areas.

Registration under Route 3 (Further Education) of the 2016 Regulations is the only route to registration available where an accredited qualification is not held. Applicants who apply under this route must hold a degree qualification but are not initially required to hold a teacher education qualification (TEQ). A relevant TEQ is required under Route 3. However applicants who meet the degree qualification requirements and who have not completed an accredited TEQ are eligible for conditional registration for a period of three years in which time this requirement must be completed.

The St. Nicholas Montessori College degree in Montessori Education has long standing recognition with the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and was subsequently amalgamated into the Council's Registration Regulations. This is being phased out. Under the 2016 Regulations, the qualification is only acceptable for registration under Route 4 Other where the application is made on or before 31 December 2023.

There are a number of Graduate and Post-graduate Diplomas in the field of Special Education which are approved by the Department of Education and Skills and can be used to add this

sector to a teacher's registration where the teacher also holds an accredited Primary teacher education qualification. The Teaching Council works within DES policy and central to this policy is that all teachers teaching children with Special Educational Needs should be qualified Primary or Post-primary teachers in the first instance and may then apply for one of the DES recognised qualifications in Special Educational Needs as outlined in the DES circular 0004/2018.

Third Level Institutions

249. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a college (details supplied) no longer takes masters applicants working as special needs assistants unless they are willing to take a career break; the reasoning behind this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35547/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The College concerned is a privately owned on-line third level education entity in respect of which my Department does not have any regulatory function. Programmes of initial teacher education provided in the State including those offered by this College must be accredited by the Teaching Council.

Schools Building Projects

250. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the capital funding opportunities available for educational institutions such as a centre (details supplied); and if none, if the possibility for putting in place a capital funding stream for such educational institutions in which the institution prepares students for either junior certificate and or leaving certificate level exams will be examined. [35567/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department's immediate capital funding priority is providing 20,000 new and replacement school places each year, to ensure that every child has a school place. To ensure that this is achieved, the delivery of major school projects to meet significant demographic demands nationally is the main focus for capital investment in schools in the coming years. The Six Year Construction Programme is focused on meeting this demand. In addition, on 13 April last, I announced that 42 new schools will be established over the next four years (2019-2022). Given the need to meet demographic growth, the delivery of new schools, together with extension projects identified by my Department's construction programme to meet future demand, will remain the focus of my Department's budget for the coming years.

My Department is not currently in a position to provide capital funding to the facility referred to by the Deputy.

While my Department's policy is to support students in mainstream provision, it also provides supports in a number of out-of-school settings including the Centre in question. Supports are also provided through the Education and Training Board sector to other out of school education providers such as Youthreach.

The Centre referred to by the Deputy currently receive financial supports from my Department through the Part-Time Hours Scheme for the teachers they employ. In addition annual non-pay grants are paid by my Department, directly to the Dublin Dun Laoghaire ETB, to meet the non-pay running costs of the Centre.

Action 88 of DEIS Plan 2017 provides for a review of current out of school provision to inform future policy in this area. This review is currently being carried out by a Working Group chaired by my Department and including representatives from Tusla and the ETB sector.

School Placement

251. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the procedure in place for a family that is unable to find a second level place in their area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35612/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department's main responsibility is to ensure that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all pupils seeking school places in an area. However, this may result in some pupils not obtaining a place in the school of their first choice. As schools may not have a place for every applicant, a selection process may be necessary. This selection process and the enrolment policy on which it is based must be non-discriminatory, and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants.

Under section 15 (2) (d) of the Education Act, 1998, each school is legally obliged to disclose its enrolment policy and to ensure that, as regards that policy, principles of equality and the right of parents to send their children to a school of the parents' choice are respected.

Section 29 of the Education Act, 1998 provides for an appeal by a parent or guardian to the Secretary General of my Department or - in the case of an Education and Training Board (ETB) school - to the ETB in the first instance, where a Board of Management of a school, or a person acting on behalf of the Board, refuses to enrol a student in a school, expels a student, or suspends a student for 20 or more days in any school year. My Department has no authority to compel a school to admit a pupil, except in the case of an appeal under section 29 of the Education Act, 1998 being upheld.

Application forms for taking a section 29 appeal are available on my Departments website at the following link :

<http://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/Appeal-against-Permanent-Exclusion-Suspension-or-Refusal-to-Enrol/Section-29-Appeals-Application-Form.doc>, or by contacting Section 29 Administration Unit, Friars Mill Road, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath, phone 0761 108588.

The Educational Welfare Service (EWS) of the Child and Family Agency (TUSLA) is the statutory agency which can assist parents who are experiencing difficulty in securing a school place for their child.

The EWS may be able to offer assistance and advice on securing a school placement within your area. The contact details for the head office of the EWS is Educational Welfare Service of the Child and Family Agency, Floors 2-5, Brunel Building, Heuston South Quarter, Dublin 8, phone number 01-7718500.

National Educational Psychological Service

252. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he will take to increase access to NEPS psychologists for schools in Newbridge, County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35614/18]

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).

I can inform the Deputy that following on from an increase allowed in the 2017 Budget that the sanctioned number for NEPS psychologists was raised to 184 whole-time equivalents of which some 177 w.t.e. posts are currently filled, with 7 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 for the 2018/19 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 above-mentioned 7 vacancies and the expansion of NEPS number by a further 10 posts.

The schools in Newbridge, to which the Deputy alludes in her question, receive service within the NEPS Dublin Mid Leinster Region from the local NEPS Naas office. The national staffing increases to date and in the immediate future are applied regionally according to relative needs and have and will allow for the deepening of service to all schools including those in Newbridge.

DEIS Expenditure

253. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the additional spend in 2017 on the 79 schools added to the DEIS programme when compared with expenditure on the same schools in 2016. [35618/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that my Department provides a wide range of resources and supports to DEIS schools each year. Such resources include additional teaching posts, grants, curriculum supports, priority access to Continuing Professional Development, etc. The full list is available on my Department's website www.education.ie at the following link: <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/deis-supports-to-deis-schools-effective-from-2017-2018-school-year.pdf>

The purpose of the overall suite of supports available to schools participating in the DEIS programme is to improve educational outcomes for pupils at greatest risk of not reaching their full potential by virtue of their socio-economic circumstances.

Details of DEIS related expenditure by my Department and other Departments, together with the number of schools in the programme is a matter of public record and can be accessed at <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/DEIS-Expenditure.pdf>

Following the publication of the DEIS Review Report and DEIS Plan 2017 in February

2017, 79 new schools were included in DEIS for the first time and a further 30 schools were upgraded from Band 2 to Band 1 status. These schools have been receiving supports since September 2017. My Department currently invests over €125m annually to fund the various supports available to the 899 schools participating in the DEIS Programme in the 2018/19 school year. It is not possible to provide the additional expenditure in 2017 over the 2016 expenditure for the 79 schools included in the DEIS Programme for the first time since September 2017 due to the diverse range of supports provided. As I have stated above the full list of resources and supports available to DEIS schools is published on my Department's website.

School Staff

254. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of English as an additional language teaching posts that exist; and the number in 2008, 2010 and 2012, respectively. [35619/18]

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

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

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 and also encompasses the Language Support (EAL) allocation that schools were allocated in previous years.

It should be noted that this is a brand new model of allocation and is not comparable to the previous model.

Under the new allocation model, schools have been provided with a total allocation for special education needs support based on their school profile.

The provision of a profiled allocation is designed to give a fairer allocation for each school which recognises that all schools need an allocation for special needs support including language support but which provides a graduated allocation which takes into account the actual level of need in each school.

Under the new allocation model, schools are frontloaded with resources, based on each school's profile, to provide supports immediately to those pupils who need it without delay.

By using a broad range of attainment and socio-economic criteria, it is expected that generally, a school's profile will remain relatively constant from year to year. Each year, some students with additional teaching needs will leave and others will enrol, broadly balancing the school profile.

Further additional temporary Language Support is also provided, as necessary, to schools that have high concentrations of pupils that require language (EAL) support. At primary level, these allocations are made on the basis of appeals by schools to the Primary Staffing Appeals Board and at post-primary level to the Post Primary Staffing Appeals Board.

School Textbooks Rental Scheme

255. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated spend on books by schools participating in the school book rental scheme at primary and post-primary level. [35620/18]

278. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the spend on the book rental scheme; the capital and current expenditure; and the number of schools participating in each of the years 2010 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form. [36000/18]

279. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated number of children at primary and second level not benefitting from the book rental scheme. [36007/18]

280. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of schools at primary and second level not participating in the book rental scheme. [36008/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 255 and 278 to 280, inclusive, together.

My Department supports the operation of book rental schemes through the funding provided under the School Books Grant Scheme. Under this scheme, my Department provides funding of €16.6m annually to primary and post-primary schools in the free education scheme. School book rental schemes have an important role to play in reducing the cost of school books for parents.

The current arrangements for the school book grant relies on the local knowledge of the school in order to ensure a fair allocation of funds to those most in need. The system is fully compatible with local autonomy.

My Department does not hold information in relation to the expenditure on books by individual schools at primary and post-primary level or on the numbers of children at primary and post-primary who benefit from the book rental scheme. However the most recent figures available indicate that 96% of primary schools and 68% of post-primary schools operate a book rental scheme.

The attached document gives a breakdown of the following:

- Funding provided under the School Book Grant Scheme for primary and post-primary schools which includes capital expenditure for the years 2010 to date.

- Numbers of schools at primary and post-primary participating in the scheme where such information is held by my Department.

One of the actions as part of the Action Plan for Education is to strengthen the focus on reducing school costs for parents by increasing the financial support for book rental schemes, in order to reduce/eliminate school book costs for parents as resources permit.

Book Grant including capital expenditure - Primary & Post-primary

Year	Primary			Post Primary
	Book Grant Paid	Seed Capital for Book Rental	Total incl seed capital	Book Grant Paid
2010	€6,870,617		€6,870,617	€7,801,046
2011	€6,906,112		€6,906,112	€7,968,084
2012	€6,980,684		€6,980,684	€8,085,243
2013	€7,090,319		€7,090,319	€8,273,229
2014	€7,198,663	€4,996,160	€12,194,823	€8,410,203
2015	€7,295,476	€5,489,790	€12,785,266	€8,610,096
2016	€7,394,194	€5,281,730	€12,675,924	€8,747,325
2017	€7,517,174		€7,517,174	€8,990,202
2018 to date	€7,573,819		€7,573,819	€9,104,229

No. of Schools participating in Book Rental Scheme

School Year	Primary Schools			Post-Primary Schools
	Participating in book rental scheme	Not participating in book rental scheme	Participating in book rental scheme	Not participating in book rental scheme
2011/2012	2493	666	Not available	Not available
2012/2013	2676	476	Not available	Not available
2013/2014	2705	440	Not available	Not available
2014/2015	2974	163	Not available	Not available
2015/2016	3001	123	428	229
2016/2017	Not available	Not available	435	228
2017/2018	Not available	Not available	450	213

School Accommodation Provision

256. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an application and appeal by a school (details supplied) for a specialised ASD portacabin to house its new ASD unit from September 2018 until the new unit is built will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35629/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, my Department approved a grant to the school in question to build a new ASD Unit in July 2018.

The current accommodation available at the school includes five classrooms and three Special Education Teacher (SET) Rooms.

For the 2018/2019 school year, the school has a requirement for four mainstream classrooms, one ASD class and three SET rooms. My Department is satisfied that the school can utilise existing accommodation to meet these teaching requirements pending the completion of the building project to provide the ASD Unit.

Emergency Works Scheme Appeals

257. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an appeal by a school (details supplied) will be upheld with regard to the refusal of an emergency works application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35640/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the appeal from the school to which he refers has been reviewed and funding has been approved to carry out the repair works in question. The school has been informed of my Department's decision.

Student Grant Scheme Appeals

258. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the case of a person (details supplied) will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35657/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The student to which the Deputy refers, has exhausted the appeals process both with SUSI and the statutory independent Student Grants Appeals Board (SGAB). There is no further review process within the statutory based appeals system under which the Student Grant Scheme operates.

Under the progression rules in the Student Grant Scheme, an undergraduate student is ineligible for a grant if s/he already holds an undergraduate higher education and training award at or above Level 8 of the framework of qualifications, or equivalent.

In terms of other supports, 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.

Tax relief at the standard rate of tax may also be claimed in respect of tuition fees paid for approved courses at approved colleges of higher education, including approved postgraduate courses in EU Member States and in non-EU countries. Further information on this tax relief is available from the Revenue Commissioners on www.revenue.ie.

University Global Rankings

259. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the decline in Irish university ratings in international rankings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35704/18]

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 most recent rankings 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.

However, 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, however bibliometrics analysis serves fields of research unequally e.g. less than 25% of humanities outputs covered by some databases, and less than 33% of social sciences. Many research outputs types (books, reports etc) are inadequately included, if they are included at all.

As such and in common with other types of quantitative research analysis, bibliometric data should be used with informed care and never in isolation from other metrics, and ideally alongside qualitative analysis and peer review.

In summary, it is clear that international rankings can impact – both positively and negatively – on international perceptions of our national university system. Therefore, it is important 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, including the System Performance Framework and the Revised Funding Allocation Model.

State Examinations

260. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** 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. [35705/18]

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.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

261. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the case of a person (details supplied) with regard to the July provision will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35771/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The July Provision Grant Scheme provides funding for an extended school year for children with severe/profound general learning disabilities or children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). Under this scheme,

the school year of participating schools is extended by four weeks in July.

Where school based provision is not feasible, the home based Scheme provides funding towards an extended school year for children with a severe or profound general learning disability and/or children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) enrolled in recognised schools.

The 2018 Home Based July Provision for primary school children ran from 2nd – 27th July inclusive, there is no provision to make grant payments towards tuition provided outside of those dates.

The terms and conditions for the July Provision Grant Scheme 2018 are set out in the Department's Information Note on the scheme which was published with the application forms and is available on my Department's website at www.education.ie

I have previously advised the Deputy that it is not possible to approve an application for the July Provision Grant unless the tutor engaged by Parents is registered and vetted by the teaching council in advance of the provision of tuition.

While the deadline for applications under the scheme was 18th May 2018, my Department accepted late applications from Parent's and processed them in a timely manner.

With regard to the application referred to the Deputy, a completed application was submitted by the Parent on the 25 July, 2018. The application was processed immediately and funding for 10 hours tuition was approved, the maximum available during the last week of the scheme.

As outlined above the 2018 Home Based July Provision for primary school children ran from 2nd – 27th July inclusive, there is no provision to make grant payments towards tuition provided outside of those dates. Grant funding can only issue in line with the published terms and conditions of the scheme.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

262. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to reduce the pupil-teacher ratio; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35777/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): 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.

Since September 2016, my Department has provided for 4800 additional teachers across the school system. These improvements improved the ratio of teachers to students from 16:1 to 15.3:1 at primary level and 14.1:1 to 13.1:1 at post-primary level.

Budget 2018 provided for a further 1280 posts from September 2018.

At primary level, 145 additional teachers have been allocated to meet demographic needs, 305 posts to reduce the staffing schedule by 1 point and a further 30 resource teachers and 163 SEN teachers.

At post-primary level, 400 additional teachers have been allocated to meet demographic needs, with an additional 70 resource teachers, 100 teachers in respect of Guidance and 67 SEN teachers.

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.

Mental Health Services Provision

263. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the current and planned investment in mental health counselling at third level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35778/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department allocates recurrent funding to the Higher Education Authority (HEA) for direct disbursement to HEA designated higher education institutions. The HEA allocates this funding as a block grant to the institutions. As autonomous bodies, the internal disbursement of this funding, including the funding of student services, is a matter for the individual institution.

Details of expenditure incurred in respect of counselling services in the third level sector are outlined below. Data in respect of the academic year 2016/17 is not immediately available, however, it is expected that it would be broadly in line with previous years.

Date	Universities and Colleges (incl MIC, NCAD & St Angela's College)	IoTs
2014/15	€3,853,638	€2,185,196
2015/16	€4,185,682	€2,299,286

Student services and associated activities are an integral part of the whole student experience at third level. Student services support each individual student achieve his/her intellectual, cultural and social potential while supporting and complementing the formal academic programme. Student services can fall under a number of headings, particularly 'Welfare and Guidance' which includes counselling services, health promotion, careers service, multi-faith, racial and ethnic cultural support.

The Deputy may wish to note that AHEAD, the Association for Higher Education Access and Disability, is supported through an annual grant from the HEA towards the cost of the activities of the organisation. In 2016, AHEAD in partnership with the National Learning Network (NLN), published a report called 'Mental Health Matters', a study into the experiences of students with mental health difficulties. The study found that the majority of HEIs have services supporting students with mental health difficulties and some institutions have dedicated services for students.

The report made a number of recommendations such as the promotion of mental health awareness to students on their induction, the provision of mental health awareness at institutional level for staff and institutions adopting a whole of campus strategic response to meet the needs of students experiencing mental health.

School Transport Eligibility

264. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a person (details supplied) is not eligible for a bus ticket to attend college in County Cavan in view of the fact that their two older siblings are eligible for same. [35797/18]

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.

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.

In the 2017/18 school year over 117,000 children, including over 12,000 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 4,500 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually at a total cost of almost €190 million in 2017.

Under the terms of my Department's Post Primary School Transport Scheme children are eligible for school transport where they reside not less than 4.8 kilometres from and are attending their nearest education centre as determined by my Department/Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language.

Bus Éireann, which operate school transport on behalf of my Department, has advised that when an application was made in 2017 for the child referred to by the Deputy, it was discovered that this family were not attending their nearest school and that the siblings of the child referred to by the Deputy were originally deemed eligible in error.

Children who are deemed eligible in error retain their transport eligibility for the duration of their post primary education cycle provided there is no change to their current circumstances.

However, as the child in question is not attending his nearest education centre he is not eligible for school transport under the terms of the scheme.

The terms of this scheme are applied equitably on a national basis.

School Staff

265. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if school secretaries and bus drivers are paid their wages during the summer holidays; if not, if they have to sign for jobseeker's benefit during school holidays; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35806/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The majority of primary and voluntary secondary schools in the Free Education Scheme now receive capitation grant assistance to provide for secretarial, caretaking and cleaning services. 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. Though schemes were initiated in 1978 and 1979 for the employment of Clerical Officers and Caretakers in primary and secondary schools, where staff employed on these schemes are paid directly by the Department and not via grant funding, these schemes have been largely phased out and have been superseded by the more extensive capitation grant scheme. My Department has no plans to develop an alternative scheme for schools to employ secretaries separate to the current system of capitation grant assistance.

In terms of the latest negotiations that have taken place with regard to school secretaries, in 2015 my Department engaged with the Union side on negotiations in relation to the pay of

school secretaries (and caretakers) who are employed using grant funding, and agreed to enter an arbitration process on that issue. 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.

With regard to bus drivers, and as the Deputy is aware, Bus Éireann operates the school transport scheme on behalf of the Department, and issues regarding the terms and conditions and employment status of bus drivers under that scheme is a matter for Bus Éireann.

Special Educational Needs Staff

266. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the current level of special needs assistants at a school (details supplied) will be retained; and if he will engage with the NCSE in this regard. [35809/18]

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 sup-

port will receive access to such support.

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 school, I have referred the question to the NCSE for their direct reply.

Special Educational Needs Staff

267. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a special needs assistant will be appointed on a specific basis to assist a person (details supplied) when the term commences at a school; and if the appeal which has been lodged will be expedited. [35825/18]

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.

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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.

School Staff

268. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to address the issue of two super sized classes at a school (details supplied); if he will engage with the school to resolve this issue as a matter of urgency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35826/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The criteria used for the allocation of teaching posts is published annually on the Department website. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September. The staffing schedule operates in a clear and transparent manner and treats all similar types of schools equally irrespective of location.

The school referred to by the Deputy had an enrolment of 167 on 30th September 2017. This provides for a mainstream staffing of Principal and 5 classroom teachers for the 2018/19 school year. The school will also have 1 full-time and 1 shared Special Education Teachers.

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

The school submitted an application for consideration by the Appeals Board at its May 2018 meeting under the Exceptional Accommodation Difficulties criteria. The appeal was refused by the Appeals Board on the basis that the grounds of the appeal did not warrant the allocation of an additional post under Circular 0010/2018. The Appeals Board operates independently of the Department and its decision is final.

The configuration of classes and the deployment of classroom teachers are done at local school level. My Department's guidance to schools is that the number of pupils in any class is kept as low as possible taking all relevant contextual factors into account (e.g. classroom accommodation, fluctuating enrolment etc.). School authorities are also requested, where possible, to use their autonomy under the staffing schedule to implement smaller class sizes for junior classes. Given that the staffing schedule operates to a general average of one classroom teacher for every 26 pupils, if a school has a large class it generally also has a small class.

Mental Health Services Provision

269. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the current and planned investment in mental health counselling at second level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35831/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Within my Department's Action Plan for Education in 2016/19 mental health and wellbeing promotion is afforded a high priority and is one of the key goals. My Department is strongly supportive of the promotion of positive mental health awareness in post-primary schools. The Department adopts a holistic and integrated approach to supporting schools in promoting positive mental health and to supporting those with a broad range of problems including behavioural, emotional and social.

To support this holistic approach my Department has published a Wellbeing Policy and Framework for Practice (2018-2023) for all schools which will inform how schools can promote student wellbeing. It is the Department's aim that by 2023 all schools and centres for education will have embedded a dynamic Wellbeing Promotion Process which promotes a whole school preventative approach to the promotion of wellbeing with interventions at both universal and targeted levels. This approach is the most beneficial evidence informed approach for schools in the promotion of mental health and the support for students with mental health difficulties. The Wellbeing Policy includes an Implementation Plan with seven high level actions to support the realisation of the policy. Actions 2, 3 and 4 below focus on the need for the training of teachers which will include work with schools to ensure those students with most needs, including mental health needs, receive the highest level of support.

- Plan and provide for the national roll-out of a professional development process to facilitate all schools and centres for education to engage with and embed a Wellbeing Promotion Process which builds professional capacity and collaborative cultures in schools from 2018-2023.

- Provide for an aligned, comprehensive and easily-accessible programme of support for all schools and centres for education to address school-identified Wellbeing Promotion Needs.

- Consider how the system is meeting current and future teachers' learning needs relating to wellbeing promotion.

The Wellbeing Policy also builds on the work already taking place in schools including the new Framework for Junior Cycle (2015) which places a clear emphasis on overall student health and wellbeing. This Framework is underpinned by eight principles, one of which is "Wellbeing" covering the development of key skills of "Managing Myself" and "Staying Well" which cover issues such as mental health and mental ill-health, dealing with tough times, loss and bereavement. A Junior Cycle Wellbeing programme was introduced to post primary schools in 2017 as part of the Framework for Junior Cycle which includes the implementation of curricular areas of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Physical Education. Support for implementation of the national Wellbeing in Post Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention (2013) is also encompassed within the Wellbeing Policy and Framework for Practice implementation.

Responsibility for provision of mental health services and counselling for young people lies with the Department of Health and the Health Service Executive. Schools are advised to identify supports and services that are available in their community, build relationships and agree referral pathways for students needing referral. The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) provides psychological support and engages in collaborative work helping school staff including the school's Guidance Counselling Service in how to access appropriate mental health services. Psychologists support schools in connecting with Primary Care Psychology Services and Child and Adolescent Mental Health services in relation to individual children and young people with mental health needs. Psychologists support and encourage the establish-

ment of referral and communication protocols between education and health services at local level and work with others to develop community based mental health promotion strategies. In addition NEPS psychologists provide support to schools in implementing Student Support Teams in Post Primary Schools (2014). A project is planned for supporting three clusters of schools in Donegal, Dublin and Cork in developing or reviewing student support teams in post primary schools in September 2018.

NEPS also provides guidelines and resource materials for schools to enable them to deal with certain traumatic events which can adversely affect students and school staff. The guidelines responding to Critical Incidents: Guidelines and Resource Materials for Schools (2016) refer to preventive approaches that schools can adopt in creating a safe and supportive environment. It also outlines how schools can plan for crises. The publication provides support to schools at a potentially overwhelming time with practical step-by-step guidance for teachers and principals on how to respond when a tragedy occurs. The guidelines focus on alerting schools to planning processes, structures and actions which will better allow them to cope with a traumatic incidents such as suicide or suspected suicide, murder, accidental death including road traffic accidents and drowning, and death through illness of members of the school community. In relation to suicide, advice is also given on prevention and positive mental health stratagems and approaches. NEPS psychologists will also, at the specific invitation of school authorities, attend at the schools immediately following such incidents to offer direct advice and assistance to school staff and students.

A Wellbeing Steering Committee is overseeing the implementation plan in the Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice within my Department. It examines issues in relation to the co-ordination and aligning of the range of supports provided to schools in regard to wellbeing and mental health promotion. This involves coordinating the liaison with other Departments and Government agencies.

Significant resources and developments to achieve these actions have been committed to across a number of sections of the Department. NEPS capacity to enhance educational psychological service to schools has been increased through the appointment of an additional 10 educational psychologists in the last academic year and a further 10 psychologists in 2018/19. The focus of part of this additional support, in the context of post-primary schools, is on extending the delivery of training in the Friends programmes to teachers in DEIS schools. This programme, when delivered by trained teachers, reduces anxiety and promotes coping, resilience and school-connectedness in young people thus promoting mental health.

Enhancing Guidance Counselling Provision at post-primary level has been achieved through improvements in the guidance allocation to schools, with Budgets 2016 and 2017 together seeing the allocation of the equivalent of 500 guidance posts, following budget measures in 2012 which removed the ex-quota provision for guidance posts (which amounted to some 600 posts). The 500 guidance posts which have now been restored will be allocated separately and transparently. This means that there is now an obligation on principals to ensure that these hours are used for guidance activities. Principals may decide to allocate more hours to guidance activities than the amount allocated on the schedule; they cannot decide to allocate fewer.

Circular Letter 0010/2017 ‘Approved Allocation of Teaching Posts 2017/18 School Year’ provides a separate guidance allocation to schools by reducing the Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR). The CL states that “Guidance plans should outline the school’s approach to guidance generally and how students can be supported and assisted in making choices and successful transitions in the personal and social, educational and career areas.” Schools are asked to consider “how best to align resource allocation with the objectives of the Guidance Plan”.

The Department also works with the Department of Health to promote participation by primary and post-primary schools in the Health Promoting Schools initiative, which is supported by the Health Service Executive. This European-wide programme aims to strengthen schools' capacity to be a healthy setting for learning and working by focusing on whole-school level conditions that affect health and wellbeing of children and young people.

Finding new ways of tackling policy issues that are not the sole responsibility of any one Government Department or agency has been prioritised by Government. My Department has been involved with the Taskforce on Youth Mental Health as part of the programme for Government. One of the challenges of providing a coordinated, streamlined approach to mental health promotion is the fact that there are so many statutory and voluntary agencies/services/NGOs involved. The Task Force was established to produce a series of action-focused recommendations to improve youth mental health. The main areas of focus comprised: emotional literacy and reduction of stigma; awareness of services and supports; accessibility to services and supports across different settings; alignment of services and supports across different providers; and building capacity in local communities. The report has been published and a memorandum has been agreed the Government.

The work of implementing the Taskforce recommendations will be linked with the Youth Mental Health Pathfinder Project. Youth mental health and suicide prevention is one of three Pathfinder Projects under Action 5 of the Civil Service Renewal Plan (2014) and agreed by the Civil Service Management Board. This Youth Mental Health Pathfinder Project is an initiative to innovate and improve whole-of-Government working on cross-cutting policy issues and improve the delivery of shared whole-of-Government projects. The aim is to strengthen management and accountability of cross-cutting projects that involve multiple Departments, Offices and Agencies and ensure that policies that are not the priority or responsibility of a single body are effectively managed, supported and resourced.

Schools Property

270. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department has on file details of a lease agreement in respect of a primary school (details supplied); if so, if these details can be made available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35843/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm that my Department does not currently have a lease agreement in place in respect of the property referred to by the Deputy

Fee Paying Schools

271. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of pupils attending fee-paying schools; and the figure for primary and post-primary schools. [35851/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In the 2017/2018 academic year there were 4,155 pupils attending fee-paying primary schools.

It should be noted that data coverage of fee-paying primary schools is not complete, as these schools are not aided by the Department and therefore there is no requirement for such schools to make detailed statistical returns to the Department.

At post primary level, there were 25,537 pupils attending fee-paying schools. Further information on enrolment figures for these schools can be found on the Department's website at the following link: <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Data-on-Individual-Schools/>.

Fee Paying Schools

272. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the subsidies granted to fee-paying schools in each of the past three years by school in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35852/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The teachers' salaries for the fee charging schools for the latest three years that it is available are set out in tabular form below.

I will arrange for the data on capital expenditure to be forwarded to the Deputy in the near future.

According to the most recent figures available, the cost of including fee charging schools in the free scheme would cost an additional €23.55 million per year.

Fee Charging Schools

School year	Teacher Gross Salaries	
2016/2017	€83,126,057.00	Plus 10.5% Employer PRSI contribution
2015/2016	€80,185,517.84	Plus 10.5% Employer PRSI contribution
2014/2015	€79,324,645.11	Plus 10.5% Employer PRSI contribution

School Transport Eligibility

273. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to amend the rule by which medical card holders can only access free travel to school if they attend the closest school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35872/18]

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.

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.

In the 2017/18 school year over 117,000 children, including over 12,000 children with special educational needs, were 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.

Children are generally eligible for school transport if they satisfy the distance criteria and are attending their nearest school.

Children who are eligible for school transport and who hold valid medical cards (GMS Scheme) are exempt from paying the annual charge.

In addition, there is no charge for children who are eligible for school transport under the terms of my Department's School Transport Scheme for children with Special Educational Needs.

Children who are not eligible for school transport may apply for transport on a concessionary basis only which is subject to a number of terms and conditions including the availability of spare seats and payment of the annual charge.

The terms of the School Transport Scheme are applied equitably on a national basis.

State Examinations

274. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way in which students that undertake extra subjects for their junior certificate outside of their registered school will be assessed (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35897/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Junior Cycle Framework 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.

The Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA) is a school based award issued by recognised 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 subjects for the purposes of the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA) will comprise two Classroom-Based Assessments undertaken in recognised schools, and a written examination (some subjects also have a practical examination).

Where students take extra subjects outside of their recognised school setting these subjects cannot satisfy the requirements for ongoing, formative assessment by recognised schools and cannot, therefore, be included as part of the JCPA.

Third Level Education

275. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 6811 of 13 February 2018, if he will request a response from DCU in relation to its financial relationship with another university (details supplied). [35950/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): DCU has entered into a commercial contract with the university in question for the delivery of DCU degree programmes in that university. The financial details are commercially sensitive and therefore confidential.

State Examinations Exemptions

276. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the review on the granting of exemptions from the study of Irish will be published. [35970/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): It is the Department's intention to publish the report "Review of Policy and Practice in Relation to Exemptions from Irish" as part of a public consultation process following which it is intended to update arrangements, where necessary, for exemptions from the study of Irish arising from those consultations.

Arrangements for the public consultation process are currently underway with a view to commencing the process at the earliest possible opportunity in the new school year.

Third Level Courses Availability

277. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the work being undertaken to reintroduce training and educational courses at third level specifically in the housing and social housing sector in view of the increased need for professionals in the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35992/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Department, through the National Skills Council, is committed to responding to current and emerging skills needs of the economy.

Currently the Institute of Public Administration runs a Certificate in Housing Studies (L6 Special Purpose) and a Professional Diploma in Housing Studies (L8 Special Purpose). Both of these courses cover the housing market, housing policy in Ireland and the provision of social housing support in Ireland.

The Chartered Institute of Housing, which is the UK professional body for professionals working in the housing sector, is working with the Housing Agency in Ireland to develop a network of housing professionals through membership to the Institute, and the provision of education and training. The Chartered Institute of Housing has been providing courses to professionals in the housing sector in Ireland. They provide introductory courses to housing to advanced courses for professionals at undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

Questions Nos. 278 to 280, inclusive, answered with Question No. 255.

Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme

281. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 297 of 12 June 2018, the way in which the figure of €2.3 million was arrived at; and the details of its component parts. [36029/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In line with the normal budgetary process in the Department of Education and Skills, a budget of €2.3 was arrived at for 2018 on the basis of estimating costs to implement a range of actions in the Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022. The range of actions includes the allocation of additional teaching hours to primary and post-primary schools participating in the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme from September 2018; the provision of funding for up to 30 participants in a new Irish-medium M.Ed. programme commencing from September 2018; the implementation of an e-hub digital

project in post-primary schools; the allocation of hours for the Forás language development programme in a small number of post-primary schools; provision for two Education Officers in COGG, the allocation of an additional budget to COGG to support the implementation of the Gaeltacht Policy, the provision of substitute cover for teachers attending additional CPD and the provision of additional support to island schools. The budget allocation also includes provision for printing, administration and staffing of the Gaeltacht Education Unit in the Department.

School Transport Review

282. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if changes will be made to the school transport scheme to allow for alterations or extensions to bus routes for concessionary ticket holders; if his attention has been drawn to the significant difficulty caused for families by this clause in the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36044/18]

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.

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.

In the 2017/18 school year over 117,000 children, including over 12,000 children with special educational needs, were 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.

Children are generally eligible for school transport if they satisfy the distance criteria and are attending their nearest school.

Children who are eligible for school transport and who have completed the application process on time will be accommodated on school transport services where such services are in operation for the 2018/19 school year.

Children who are not eligible for school transport may apply for transport on a concessionary basis only and will be facilitated where spare seats are available after eligible children have been accommodated. Where the number of ineligible children exceeds the number of spare seats available Bus Éireann will allocate tickets for the spare seats using an agreed selection process.

Under the terms of the scheme, routes will not be extended or altered, additional vehicles will not be introduced, nor will larger vehicles or extra trips using existing vehicles be provided to cater for children travelling on a concessionary basis, no additional State cost will be incurred in covering the cost of providing school transport for children who are not eligible.

The terms of the School Transport Scheme are applied equitably on a national basis.

School Patronage

283. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the development of a new secondary school under the patronage of an organisation (details sup-

plied) for Castleknock and Carpenterstown, Dublin 15; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36051/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, a project to deliver permanent accommodation for the school to which he refers is included in my Department's Capital 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.

In the interim the school will be accommodated from September 2018 at the former Institute of Horology property, Mill Road, Blanchardstown, Dublin 15 on a temporary basis.

Due to commercial sensitivities relating to site acquisitions generally, the Deputy will appreciate that I am not in a position to provide further details in relation to the permanent site for the school 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

284. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a school building project (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36061/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy may be aware, the project in respect of the education campus in Buncrana to cater for the schools in question is included in my Department's capital programme.

Officials in my Department continue to liaise with officials in Donegal County Council in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding in relation to the identification and acquisition of a suitable location for the proposed education campus and have identified a preferred site option. Negotiations with the landowner in respect of this proposed acquisition are currently ongoing.

Once the site has been acquired, subject to no issues arising, the project will progress into the architectural planning process.

Schools Building Projects Status

285. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application for additional permanent accommodation by a school (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36062/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The project to which the Deputy refers has been approved and has been devolved for delivery to the local Education and Training Board (ETB). It is currently being advanced by the ETB through architectural planning.

In this regard, my Department recently approved the project to proceed to Stage 2(a) which

is the developed design stage. It is a matter for the ETB, as the client for the project, to ensure that this is completed as quickly as possible. Once the stage 2 a submission is approved by my Department, the next step for the ETB's Design Team is to obtain the statutory planning approvals. When these are in place, the project can proceed to tender and construction.

Further Education and Training Programmes Funding

286. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to expand and increase the levels of capital funding available to further education centres such as ETBs through existing funding streams and programmes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36063/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): Further Education and Training (FET) provides learners with key intermediate level skills, enhancing the productivity and adaptability of the Irish workforce. It is delivered in a range of settings throughout the country, with FET providers firmly embedded in local communities. A priority for my Department, is to improve the quality of the settings in which FET is delivered, in order to better respond to the needs of learners and employers.

The recently announced National Development Plan includes a €300m capital envelope for FET over the course of 10 year period 2018-2027. With €65m already agreed for 2018-21, this represents an additional €235m over the remaining period of Plan.

The additional capital supports will be prioritised to address issues with the condition of the existing capital stock, to roll out critical new apprenticeship syllabi and courses and to consolidate the provision of further education and training in modern fit-for-purpose facilities that enable the delivery of high quality integrated programmes.

The total actual and planned capital allocation for Further Education and Training purposes 2016 to 2021 is outlined below:

	2016 - (€m)	2017 - (€m)	2018 - (€m)	2019 - (€m)	2020 - (€m)	2021 - (€m)
Further Education and Training	3.000	3.000	6.000	13.000	18.000	28.000

Gaelscoil Issues

287. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way in which opportunities will be created for the expansion of Irish-medium education outside the Gaeltacht in the context of the establishment of 42 new schools as part of a new patronage process. [36068/18]

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). 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, including those offering Irish-medium Gaelscoileanna. Parental preferences for patronage and 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.

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 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) opened in June 2018 for the four post-primary schools to be established in 2019 and my Department is currently preparing assessment reports for the NSEG. The Patronage Process for the primary schools to be established in 2019 will commence later this year.

Separately, I have announced the Schools Reconfiguration for Diversity process to help accelerate the delivery of multi-denominational and non-denominational schools towards the Government target of reaching 400 such schools by 2030. The new plans are designed to provide multi- and non-denominational schools by way of patronage transfer of existing schools. An opportunity will be available to English-medium schools seeking to make a transition to Gaelscoil provision in that context, in line with the expressed wishes of parents and the local school community.

Gaeltacht Policy

288. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when inspectors will be assigned to support the implementation of the policy on Gaeltacht education in Gaeltacht schools; and the number of inspectors that will be assigned to same. [36073/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Gaeltacht Education Unit continues to be supported by a team of inspectors since its establishment in 2017. A total of 6 inspectors are currently assigned on a part-time basis to support the Gaeltacht Education Unit in the provision of advisory visits to primary and post-primary schools participating in the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme in 2018/19. Inspectors will provide ongoing advice to schools on their action planning for improvement process to support the implementation of language-based criteria to strengthen Irish-medium educational provision in the Gaeltacht.

Apprenticeship Data

289. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of registered apprentices by county, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36085/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the tabular statement.

County	Current Apprentice Population 4/9/18
WICKLOW	293
WEXFORD	456

County	Current Apprentice Population 4/9/18
WESTMEATH	345
WATERFORD	693
TIPPERARY	501
SLIGO	203
ROSCOMMON	94
OFFALY	194
MONAGHAN	176
MEATH	643
MAYO	428
LOUTH	382
LONGFORD	84
LIMERICK	709
LEITRIM	116
LAOIS	167
KILKENNY	349
KILDARE	602
KERRY	394
GALWAY	563
DUBLIN	3,858
DONEGAL	170
CORK	1,639
CLARE	261
CAVAN	302
CARLOW	299
Total	13,921

Oideachas Gaeilge

290. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna cathain a chuirfead curaclaim idirdhealaithe T1 agus T2 ar fáil sa tsraith shinsearach. [36087/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I bhfómhar 2018, cuirfead tús le hathbheithniú ar an tsraith shinsearach agus as sin déanfar sonraíochtaí nua a cheapadh don Ghaeilge Ardteistiméireachta i gcomhthéacsanna T1 agus T2 araon. Faoi láthair, tá súil againn na sonraíochtaí a bheith ar fáil i Meán Fómhair 2020 don chéad ghrúpa scoláirí a chríochnóidh na sonraíochtaí nua sraithe sóisearaí (tús Meán Fómhair 2017, críoch Meitheamh 2020). Ní mór a chur san áireamh gur obair chasta í sonraíochtaí a cheapadh, ó thaobh leagan amach agus feidhmiú araon, agus mar sin is sprioc sealadach é 2020.

School Transport

291. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the details of the agreement entered into between his Department and the management of a former school (details supplied) at the time of the closure of the school in 1967; the agreement's position on the school's amalgamation with another school; the agreement's position on the transportation of schoolchildren from one area to the latter school; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[36091/18]

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.

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.

In the 2017/18 school year over 117,000 children, including over 12,000 children with special educational needs, were 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.

School transport arrangements under the Central/Closed School Rule originated from the last major amalgamation of schools in the late 1960's. Given the time lapse it is not feasible to provide copies of agreements, where they exist, reached between the Department and the School Authorities at the time of amalgamation.

In any event, changes to my Department's Primary School Transport Scheme which were finalised for the beginning of the 2012 school year mean that children are now eligible for transport where they reside not less than 3.2 kms from and are attending their nearest national school as determined by the Department/Bus Eireann, having regard to ethos and language.

The terms of the Primary School Transport Scheme are applied equitably on a national basis.

Emergency Works Scheme Applications

292. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application by a school (details supplied) for emergency funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36121/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school to which the Deputy refers submitted an application for funding under my Departments Emergency Works Scheme to carry out roof repairs to the school building. Following review of this application officials from my department requested additional information from the school authority. Upon receipt of same a decision will be made on the application and the school authority will be informed directly.

Teacher Redeployment

293. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the case of a person (details supplied) will be reviewed; the options available to them; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36170/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The core function of the redeployment arrangements is to facilitate the redeployment of all surplus permanent teachers to other schools that have vacancies. The redeployment of all surplus permanent teachers is key to the Department's ability to manage within its payroll budget. Thereafter, schools are required under the panel arrangements to fill permanent vacancies from supplementary panels comprised of eligible fixed-term (temporary/substitute) and part-time teachers.

After the redeployment and supplementary panel processes have transacted, each school is permitted to fill any remaining vacancies through open recruitment. It is open to any suitably qualified teacher to apply for these advertised teaching positions as they arise.

The redeployment arrangements are reviewed and agreed annually with the Education Partners (i.e. School management bodies, Teacher Unions etc). Arrangements for the next school year will be finalised later in the Autumn and the relevant circulars will be available on my Department's website at that stage.

Schools Building Projects Status

294. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a development at a school (details supplied) in County Cork. [36179/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school building project referred to by the Deputy 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 in Carrigtwohill, Co. Cork. The project is currently in architectural planning, which is the design development stage. The project will proceed to secure the necessary statutory approvals before proceeding to tender and construction stages.

Schools Building Projects Status

295. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a development at a school (details supplied) in County Cork. [36180/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, a building project for the school referred to is included in my Department's Capital Programme.

In the context of progressing the project it will be necessary to prepare a project brief. This process involves a site visit by technical staff of my Department. In that context, my Department will be in direct contact with the school authority shortly.

Schools Building Projects Status

296. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a development at a school (details supplied) in County Cork. [36181/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school to which the Deputy refers was established in September 2015 and is currently operating from interim accommodation on a rented property. The project in relation to the temporary accommodation has been devolved by my Department to the school patron, Cork Education and Training Board.

The building project for the school's permanent accommodation 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 in Carrigtwohill, Co. Cork. The project is currently in architectural planning, which is the design development stage. The project will proceed to secure the necessary statutory approvals before proceeding to tender and construction stages.

Education and Training Boards

297. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if education and training boards or other employers are entitled to demand that new employees attend two weeks of induction before school term commences and before the individual contracts are dated to commence. [36198/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): My Department understand from engagement with your office that the individual referred to in this parliamentary question is a teacher employed by an Education and Training Board (ETB).

Each school Board of Management or ETB has sole responsibility for the appointment of its teachers. The ETB is a statutory body with its own corporate status established under the Education and Training Boards Act 2013. Terms and conditions of employment for staff employed by ETBs are matters for the ETB concerned. While the recruitment and appointment of teachers to fill teaching posts is a matter for the individual school authority or in this case ETB it is subject to procedures agreed under Section 24(3) of the Education Act 1998 (as amended by the Education (Amendment) Act 2012).

Teaching Council of Ireland

298. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the case of a person (details supplied) will be reviewed; his views on the Teaching Council's response to same; the actions that can be taken to assist the person on this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36204/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Under the Teaching Council Acts 2001-2015 the Teaching Council is the statutory body with responsibility for the registration of teachers.

The person to whom the Deputy refers is advised to contact the Teaching Council in relation to their registration, and they will provide information as to the provisions and mechanisms in place to register as a teacher in Ireland.

State Examinations

299. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the State Examinations Commission has moved away from the bell curve structure of results in the three science subjects at leaving certificate level (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36206/18]

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.

School Transport Provision

300. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a full review of the school bus transport scheme will be carried out, in particular in regard to concessionary bus tickets in order that more seats can be made available in pressure-point areas (details supplied). [36223/18]

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.

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.

In the 2017/18 school year over 117,000 children, including over 12,000 children with special educational needs, were 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.

Children are generally eligible for school transport if they satisfy the distance criteria and are attending their nearest school.

Children who are eligible for school transport and who have completed the application process on time will be accommodated on school transport services where such services are in operation for the 2018/19 school year.

Children who are not eligible for school transport may apply for transport on a concessionary basis only and will be facilitated where spare seats are available after eligible children have been accommodated. Where the number of ineligible children exceeds the number of spare seats available Bus Éireann will allocate tickets for the spare seats using an agreed selection process.

Under the terms of the scheme, routes will not be extended or altered, additional vehicles will not be introduced, nor will larger vehicles or extra trips using existing vehicles be provided to cater for children travelling on a concessionary basis, no additional State cost will be incurred in covering the cost of providing school transport for children who are not eligible.

Arising from commitments in the Programme for Government, a review of the Concessionary Charges and Rules element of the School Transport Scheme was undertaken.

The review was published in December 2016 and made recommendations on both the charges and the rules element of concessionary school transport.

The report also recommended that the number of concessionary places should be reduced in line with the rules introduced in 2012 on a phased basis. Previous plans to advance this option were put on hold, pending the completion of the review.

However upon consideration of the review and following discussions with the Cross Party Working Group which I established to feed into the review, I decided that there should be no planned programme of downsizing in the coming year except in line with normal operational decisions within the current scheme.

The terms of the School Transport Scheme are applied equitably on a national basis.

301. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to a situation in which a retired teacher receiving a pension can only be paid on the first point of the lecturer's payscale in view of the fact they are considered a retired public servant regardless of the number of years of teaching experience or qualifications they may have; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36232/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In circumstances where a retired public servant takes up employment in another public service employer, the employee starts on the first point of scale for that post.

In the circumstance you have described there is no obstacle to progression up that salary scale.

As in the case of all retired public servants in receipt of pension benefits who return to employment in the public sector, the pension benefits of the person concerned may be subject to abatement, in accordance with provision of the Article 52 of Single Scheme Act of 2012.

Abatement is the mechanism used to ensure that the combined earnings of a retired public servant (pension plus pay) do not exceed the final salary on which the pension is based, adjusted to current rates.

Child Protection

302. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the policy that informs the practices of a school, similar to bullying policy, when a student is sexually assaulted by another student. [36249/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Department of Justice and Equality is responsible for the national criminal justice framework and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs is responsible for national policy in relation to the protection and welfare of children.

My Department's role is to give guidance and direction to schools in relation to meeting their statutory and other obligations in respect of the protection of children.

In December 2017, my Department published new Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary School 2017 which give direction and guidance to schools authorities and to school personnel in relation to meeting their new statutory obligations under the Children First Act, 2015 and in the continued implementation of the best practice (non-statutory) guidance set out in Children First National Guidance 2017 which requires all reasonable concerns about child abuse, including sexual abuse, to be reported to Tusla and An Garda Síochána where appropriate. The new procedures are published on my Departments website www.education.ie.

My Department's Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary schools recognise that child protection and welfare considerations permeate all aspects of school life and must be appropriately reflected in all of the school's policies, practices and activities. The procedures require schools to prepare, display and publish a Child Safeguarding Statement in accordance with the requirements of the Children First Act 2015. As part of the Child Safeguarding Statement schools are required to undertake a risk assessment to help identify the child protection and welfare considerations applicable to school activities, policies, procedures and practices.

My Department's procedures for schools also outline that under the Criminal Justice (Withholding of Information on Offences against Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012 it is a

criminal offence to withhold information about certain serious offences, against a person under 18 years or a vulnerable person.

The reporting obligations under the Criminal Justice (Withholding of Information on Offences against Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012 are in addition to the reporting obligations under Children First National Guidance 2017 and the Children First Act, 2015.

Site Acquisitions

303. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress made in identifying a site for the proposed new post-primary school under the patronage of an organisation (details supplied) that is due to open in the Castletroy/Monaleen area of County Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36271/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, officials in my Department are working to acquire a suitable site based upon thorough selection criteria. A suitable site has now been identified and discussions have been progressed with the landowner. Once agreement has been finalised between both parties, it is the Department's intention to commence the process of conveyancing immediately.

Due to commercial sensitivities relating to site acquisitions generally I am not in a position to provide further details at this time.

Departmental Circulars

304. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a 2016 circular (details supplied) has been updated; if this document has been withdrawn; if so, the reason therefor; if a subsequent circular has been issued; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36290/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Information note referred to by the Deputy is still available on my Department's website at <http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/Grants-and-Additional-Support/New-ASD-Classes-Staffing-Supports-and-Grants-Information.pdf> and is currently being updated with information for 2018/19 school year.

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

School Transport

305. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an extra school bus will be made available to accommodate children (details supplied) attending a school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36327/18]

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.

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.

In the 2017/18 school year over 117,000 children, including over 12,000 children with special educational needs, were 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.

Children are generally eligible for school transport if they satisfy the distance criteria and are attending their nearest school.

Children who are eligible for school transport and who have completed the application process on time will be accommodated on school transport services where such services are in operation for the 2018/19 school year.

Bus Éireann has advised that the child in question is not eligible for school transport. Children who are not eligible for school transport may apply for transport on a concessionary basis only and will be facilitated where spare seats are available after eligible children have been accommodated. Where the number of ineligible children exceeds the number of spare seats available Bus Éireann will allocate tickets for the spare seats using an agreed selection process.

Under the terms of the scheme, routes will not be extended or altered, additional vehicles will not be introduced, nor will larger vehicles or extra trips using existing vehicles be provided to cater for children travelling on a concessionary basis, no additional State cost will be incurred in covering the cost of providing school transport for children who are not eligible.

The terms of the School Transport Schemes are applied equitably on a national basis.

Student Grant Scheme

306. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if changes (details supplied) to the SUSI grant will be considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36335/18]

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.

Any decision to review the distance criteria would have to be considered in the context of the overall priorities and financial resources available for higher and further education.

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 Accommodation

307. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an increase in the provision of student accommodation (details supplied) will be considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36337/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Government is committed, through the National Student Accommodation Strategy (NSAS), to meeting the accommodation needs of students.

The key to ensuring all students can access adequate accommodation, at a reasonable cost, is to increase supply. To date actions under the National Student Accommodation Strategy has delivered a fast-track planning procedure for strategic housing developments, which includes student accommodation projects containing 200 or more bed spaces, under the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016. The Act also provides for Higher Education Institutes to borrow money from the Housing Finance Agency for the purposes of financing student accommodation provision.

The target in the Strategy was to facilitate the construction of 7,000 PBSA bed spaces by the end of 2019 and 21,000 by 2024. We are on track to meet, and likely exceed, these targets. Figures at the end of July indicate that over 4,000 bed spaces have been delivered in the past two years with a further 1,160 due for completion this month.

Moreover, the Government is committed to taking steps to improve the position of rent predictability for students, and the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government are working to develop proposals in this regard.

In the immediate term, the Government are supporting the USI #HomesforStudy campaign which aims to increase the numbers of rooms available in digs accommodation. This offers students an alternative to purpose built student accommodation. Information for homeowners on renting a room, or students looking for digs accommodation can be found on *homes.usi.ie*.

Oiliúint Múinteoirí

308. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna céard atá sé chun a dhéanamh lena chinntiú go bhfuil soláthar múinteoirí le Gaeilge ar fáil chun ábhair a mhúineadh trí Ghaeilge sna meánscoileanna ar na hoileáin; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [36340/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Mar chuid den Pholasáí don Oideachas Gaeltachta 2017-2022, tá roinnt beart tugtha chun cinn agam a thacóidh le soláthar múinteoirí i scoileanna ina ndéantar an teagasc trí mheán na Gaeilge sa Ghaeltacht i gcoitinne, na hoileáin san áireamh. I dtaca leis sin, tá méadú déanta agam ar líon na n-áiteanna atá ar fáil ar an gclár i gcomhair oideachas tosaigh múinteoirí iar-bhunoideachais trí mheán na

Gaeilge ar a dtugtar Máistir Gairmiúil san Oideachas, atá á thairiscint cheana féin in OÉ Gailimh. Ina theannta sin, fógraíodh dhá chlár oideachais múinteoirí trí mheán na Gaeilge le déanaí. Cuirfidh na clár nua suas le 60 áit nua in aghaidh na bliana ar fáil d'oideachas múinteoirí trí mheán na Gaeilge. Beidh siad á soláthar ag Institiúid Oideachais Marino agus ag Coláiste Mhuire gan Smál. Déanfaidh Institiúid Oideachais Marino clár ceithre bliana don Bhaitisiléir Oideachais (B.Ed) trí mheán na Gaeilge a sholáthar in 2019 agus reáchtálfaidh Coláiste Mhuire gan Smál Máistreacht san Oideachas (M.Ed.) trí mheán na Gaeilge do mhúinteoirí bunscoile agus iar-bhunscoile, lena n-áirítear príomhoidí, ag tosú in 2018.

Chomh maith leis sin, bhunaigh mé an Grúpa Stiúrtha um Sholáthar Múinteoirí níos luaithe i mbliana, a bhfuil Ard-Rúnaí mo Roinne mar chathaoirleach air.

Tá na ceisteanna a bhfuil tionchar acu ar sholáthar múinteoirí, lena n-áirítear: polasaí i leith oideachas tosaigh múinteoirí, soláthar, cistiú agus tacaíocht; riachtanais/sonraí taighde; polasaithe agus socruithe do scoileanna agus do mhúinteoirí a bhfuil tionchar acu ar shoghluaisteacht/sholáthar múinteoirí; agus cur chun cinn ghairm na múinteoireachta á mbreithniú ag an nGrúpa. Déanfaidh an Grúpa Stiúrtha maoirseacht ar chlár gníomhaíochtaí de réir amlínte dochta agus spriocanna soiléire inghnóthaithe. Agus iad ag tabhairt faoin obair seo, tá an Grúpa eolach ar an riachtanas go sásódh gach duine, ar mian leis nó léi bheith ag teagasc i scoileanna aitheanta, na caighdeáin ghairmiúla agus na critéir i gcomhair clárúcháin atá leagtha síos ag an gComhairle Mhúinteoireachta, atá mar chomhlacht rialála gairme do ghairm na múinteoireachta.

Ag an bpointe seo, tá an Grúpa Stiúrtha agus na grúpaí oibre atá ag tuairisciú dó tar éis teacht le chéile roinnt uaireanta, agus tá súil agam go mbeidh ar mo chumas bearta breise sa réimse seo a fhógairt sna míonna seo amach romhainn.

Oideachas Gaeilge

309. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna cén uair a chuirfear an t-athbhreithniú, a fógraíodh tamall de bhlianta ó shin, ar an scéim díolúine ón nGaeilge sna meánscoileanna, i gcrích; cén uair a fhógrófar torthaí an athbhreithnithe; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [36342/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Is é rún na Roinne an tuarascáil “Athbhreithniú ar Pholasaí agus Cleachtas i dtaca leis an Díolúine ón nGaeilge” a fhoilsiú mar chuid de phróiseas poiblí comhairliúcháin agus tá sé beartaithe na socruithe maidir le díolúine ó ábhar na Gaeilge a thabhairt chun dáta, más gá, ag éirí as na comhairliúcháin sin.

Tá socruithe ar bun cheana féin chun an próiseas poiblí comhairliúcháin a sheoladh a luaithe is féidir.

Disability Support Services

310. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a person (details supplied) will be retrospectively considered for the DARE programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36350/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Disability Access Route to Education (DARE) offers places at reduced points to school leavers with disabilities. Admissions under the DARE scheme is regulated by the institutions themselves and not by my Department. Each higher institution determines its own admission policy in relation to DARE,

the number of places they reserve for DARE and the allocation of those places.

Any requests for more detailed information about DARE and this particular application should be directed to the Central Applications Office (CAO) (www.cao.ie) who coordinate the DARE scheme for participating institutions.

Skills Shortages

311. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the action he has taken to identify and address skill shortages in the construction sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36360/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): Securing additional skills supply from education and training to meet the needs of 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 (NDP) and the National Planning Framework (NPF).

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 an expansion in apprenticeship recruitment.

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.

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.

The range of apprenticeships on offer is also being expanded to meet the identified skill needs of the sector. 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 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.

Schools Refurbishment

312. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the funding options open to schools in circumstances in which refurbishment or upgrade works are required that are outside the minor works grant scheme and not large enough to come under the capital works scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36385/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that funding for the works outlined are appropriate to the Summer Works Scheme (SWS). The purpose of the SWS is to devolve funding to individual school authorities to undertake small and medium scale improvement works that will upgrade existing school facilities, which can be carried out during the summer months or at other times that avoid disrupting the operation of the school. The scheme is designed to address necessary and immediate works within the funding available.

Where a school did not apply under SWS 2016 and 2017, it will be open to the school, if it so decides, to make an application under a future scheme. Alternatively, a school may use its minor works grant to carry out the works in full or on a phased basis as that grant permits, if the school considers it to be a priority.

Departmental Communications

313. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the positions in his Department and the organisations under its aegis that have arrangements in place for lo-call numbers or 1800, 1850 and 1890 telephone numbers for members of the public to contact his Department or organisations under its aegis; the number of these that are completely free to call for persons who use mobile telephones and may incur major bills telephoning such organisations; if the situation will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36397/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I confirm that my Department does not operate either of the lo-call numbers 1850 or 1890. Selective use has been made of a Freephone telephone number for a defined period of time to provide information on specific schemes and services. The last occasion on which this number was used was 2015.

The following table details information in regard to the those aegis bodies who operate lo-call, 1800, 1850 and 1890 phone numbers.

Name of aegis Bodies who operate Lo Call Numbers	Lo call numbers in use by body	Are Lo Call Numbers free to users including Mobile Callers	Will Body review use of Lo call Numbers in circumstances where they incur a charge for mobiles?
SOLAS	1890 number	Its one number which is used for jobseekers referred through DSP is free to all callers, including mobile phone users.	Not applicable
The Teaching Council	1890 number	1890 number is currently not free. Fees vary contingent on caller's mobile phone package	The Teaching Council intends to review the business case for continuing with the 1890 number
Higher Education Authority (Including the Irish Research Centre)	Two lo-call numbers are operated, an 1890 number by the HEA and an 1800 number for Springboard	1890 number is not free to any caller. The 1800 Springboard number is free to all callers, including mobile phone users	The HEA is currently considering replacing its legacy 1890 number with an 1800 facility
Caranua – Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Board	Two free phone numbers are in use, with one 1800 number in operation for Ireland and one 0808 number operational for the UK	Phone numbers (1800 and 0808) are free to call from all phones, both mobile and landline.	Not applicable
Residential Institutions Redress Board	There are two free phone numbers in use, one 1800 number for Ireland and one 0845 number for the UK.	Phone numbers (1800 and 0845) are free for use by persons using mobile phones.	Not applicable
State Examinations Commission	The SEC has three 1800 numbers.	SEC's 1800 numbers are free to all callers, including mobile phone users	Not applicable

Schools Establishment

314. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of new places provided for primary education in the Donaghmede area over the past three years; the number of additional spaces planned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36418/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy may be

aware, on 13th April last 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 includes two 16-classroom primary schools to be established to serve the Donaghmede_Howth_D13 school planning area in 2019 and 2021 respectively.

My Department has provided funding for a further 9 mainstream classrooms to primary schools in Donaghmede over the last 3 years. These 9 classrooms have been constructed and will provide accommodation for approximately 240 pupils. In addition, my Department provided funding for a further 2 classrooms earlier this year and this accommodation, when constructed, will provide capacity for approximately 50 pupil places.

Departmental Properties

315. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the annual rental cost of buildings rented by his Department or organisations under its aegis at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36432/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Office of Public Works (OPW) acts as an agent for Departments and is responsible for the provision of Government offices by lease/renting agreements at no direct cost to Departments. The terms of these leases/rents are a matter for the OPW. In addition, officials have been advised that none of the bodies under the aegis of the Department are owners/renting of office properties in the area referred to by the Deputy.

In regard to building rentals for purposes of school provision, I can confirm that my Department has no rental buildings in the area referred to by the Deputy.

Teachers' Professional Development

316. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his relationship with a service (details supplied); if the service reports to his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36461/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) is a Department funded support service offering professional learning opportunities to teachers and school leaders in a range of pedagogical, curricular and educational areas.

PDST was established in September 2010 arising from the amalgamation and restructuring of a number of stand-alone services.

PDST is fully funded by the Department of Education and Skills (DES). Its annual programme of work is approved by a Steering Group which is chaired by DES.

Teachers' Professional Development

317. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of

in-service training events for the State religious education programme run by a service (details supplied) for teachers in 2016 which involved Roman Catholic diocesan advisers or other similar members of other faith groups; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36462/18]

318. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the capacity in which members of religious faith groups attend in-service training events run by a service (details supplied). [36463/18]

319. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the remit under which a service (details supplied) attends religious faith formation training related events; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36464/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 317 to 319, inclusive, together.

The Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) is a Department funded support service offering professional learning opportunities to teachers and school leaders in a range of pedagogical, curricular and educational areas, including Religious Education (RE). There are no in-service training events organised by PDST which involve Roman Catholic diocesan advisers or similar members of other faith groups. All PDST in-service for RE is organised and delivered by PDST personnel.

Teachers who are registered with the Teaching Council and who teach RE as a curricular subject attend PDST in-service training in RE. PDST do not invite members of religious faith groups to attend or present at such events.

In 2016, PDST ran 6 curricular RE in-service events as follows:-

March 9 - RE workshop in Blackrock Education Centre (EC)

April 27 - RE workshop in Cork EC

October 10 - RE workshop in Cork EC

October 11 - RE workshop in Dublin West EC

October 20 - RE workshop in Athlone EC

October 28 - RE workshop in Laois EC

On occasion, PDST is requested to provide a curricular input on RE at events run by other bodies including Diocesan events and those organised by the RTAI (Religion Teacher's Association of Ireland). Any input provided by PDST is purely focused on the curricular subject of RE, teaching methodologies and Junior Certificate journal work for example.

National Educational Psychological Service Data

320. **Deputy Maria Bailey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of pupils who underwent direct assessment of the referrals for individual casework undertaken by NEPS psychologists in each of the academic years 2012-13, 2013-14 and 2014-15 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36466/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can inform the Deputy that, in common with many other psychological services and best international practice, my Department's National Educational Psychological Service (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 a child for individual 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.

Where, by agreement with the school authorities, the child is referred to the NEPS psychologist it is with the full consent of the child's parents or guardians and commences a formal documented process which is maintained on the NEPS Casetrack database.

This referral process involves a range of information gathering on the child, providing relevant background to the child's educational and social development and to the particular concerns raised which warrant consideration. Depending on the nature and context of the concerns raised the psychologist may involve themselves directly with the child in, for example, applying a range of psychometric tests or observation of the child in the school setting and / or engage in consultation with parents, teachers and other involved professionals. The overall focus of any or all of these interactions is to enable the psychologist to identify the needs of the child and to make recommendations as to the appropriate intervention(s) to address these needs.

All of the above interventions are considered to be in the context of an assessment process, some involving direct contact with the child, others not. They are all used in part or combination to inform the process. While engagement with parents and school authorities is implicit in each referral, in a minority of cases, direct contact may not be necessary between the psychologist and child.

In this context and relating to the Deputy's specific question I have made enquiries into the matter and can inform her that in 2012/13 some 6,856 referrals with NEPS involved direct contact with the child concerned, in 2013/14 – 6,418 and in 2014/15 – 6,311.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

National Educational Psychological Service Data

321. **Deputy Maria Bailey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of schemes for commissioning psychological assessments completed for the academic year 2017-18 for which certification of completion of assessment forms have been submitted by school principals between 6 September 2016 and 30 September 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36467/18]

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).

Under this SCPA scheme schools can have an assessment carried out by a member of the panel of private psychologists approved by NEPS, and NEPS will pay the psychologist the fees for this assessment directly upon receipt from school authorities of the requisite Certificate of Completion.

I can inform the Deputy that for the 2017/18 academic year NEPS some 1,459 SCPA assessments were undertaken, the necessary certification received by NEPS and paid to date.

The figure for the previous 2016/17 academic year, within the date parameters provided, is 2,520 SCPA assessments. The decrease in SCPA assessments between the two years is reflective, in part, of the growth in NEPS psychologist numbers in the period.

School Costs

322. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of schools that have provided evidence of adopting the principles of cost-effective practice relating to section 3 of Circular 0032/2017; if these schools have received rewards for same; the detail of such rewards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36475/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I have issued a Circular to all schools to ensure that they put a greater emphasis on reducing costs for parents. The Circular requires schools to do everything possible to keep costs down for parents, including the use of generic items and sew on or iron on crests. All schools are expected to carry out the provisions in the Circular.

This keen cost approach will be underpinned in law by the Parent and Student Charter Bill which will require schools to consult with parents on a number of issues, including items such as school costs. It will also require schools to publish a financial statement showing how any voluntary contributions are spent by the school.

The Department is conscious of the need to improve capitation funding, which funds general running costs, for schools. That is why increasing capitation is one of the actions included in the Action Plan for Education and this Government remains committed to achieving this.

It is intended, as resources permit, to reward schools that can provide evidence of having adopted the principles of cost-effective practice. It is intended that this could be done through some premium in capitation grants for schools. This remains the intention and will be considered in future budgets.

Educational Supports

323. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to provide extra back-to-school support and grants for children in direct provision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36476/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In Ireland all immigrant children, including children in direct provision, can access first and second level education in a manner similar to Irish nationals.

Back to school supports that are available to eligible families come under the remit of my colleague the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection. These supports include the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance (BSCFA) scheme, which provides a once-off payment to eligible families to assist with the costs of school clothing and footwear when children start school each autumn. In 2017, 151,000 families received under the scheme, including some 530 families residing in direct provision accommodation. The Government has provided €49.5 million for the scheme in 2018 which is means tested scheme.

In addition, in an attempt to reduce back to school costs for those living in direct provision accommodation centres, return to school packs have been provided in respect of some 1,100 school going children under the Fund for European Aid to the most Deprived (FEAD) EU Programme which is managed by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. The pack comprises of basic stationery items relevant to their educational level requirements.

The Action Plan for Education, which aims to make the Irish education and training service the best in Europe, commits to strengthen the focus on reducing school costs for parents. In 2017 as Minister for Education and Skills, I, introduced measures that now requires school authorities to adopt principles of cost-effective practice which will put a greater emphasis on reducing the cost of school uniforms and increase the financial support for book rental schemes, in order to reduce/eliminate school book costs for parents.

Funding is provided by my Department for the provision of a book grant to all recognised primary and post primary schools within the Free Education Scheme, with DEIS schools receiving an enhanced rate. The Department provided approximately €16.5m in total to first and second level schools by way of book grants in 2017.

Primary and Post Primary schools received funding of €15.7m over three years 2014 – 2016 in support of the establishment of book rental schemes. DEIS schools received €150 per child and non-DEIS schools received €100 per child in seed capital to establish book rental schemes. The most recent figures available indicate that 65% of primary schools operate a book rental scheme and at post primary level 68% of schools reported operating a book rental scheme.

At present as Minister for Education and Skills, I am introducing a requirement on every school to consult with parents and students regularly, and publish and operate a Parent and Student Charter. Some of the issues which schools will be required to deal with under the charter include:

- Consult students and parents regularly in relation to school costs and work to avoid costs acting as a barrier
- Publish a school financial statement which would include information on how any voluntary contributions are used
- Schools are encouraged to develop uniform policies in consultation with parents.

The Bill to provide for a Parent and Student Charter is in the process of being drafted in conjunction with the Attorney General's Office. It will be published in the coming months.

School Transport

324. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the fact that that nine school children attending a school (details supplied) in County Donegal have no concessionary seats on their school bus for the forthcoming term; if

his attention has been further drawn to the difficulties this has caused the affected families; and if the matter will be addressed in order to find a solution. [36485/18]

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.

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.

In the 2017/18 school year over 117,000 children, including over 12,000 children with special educational needs, were 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.

Children are generally eligible for school transport if they satisfy the distance criteria and are attending their nearest school.

Children who are eligible for school transport and who have completed the application process on time will be accommodated on school transport services where such services are in operation for the 2018/19 school year.

Children who are not eligible for school transport may apply for transport on a concessionary basis only and will be facilitated where spare seats are available after eligible children have been accommodated. Where the number of ineligible children exceeds the number of spare seats available Bus Éireann will allocate tickets for the spare seats using an agreed selection process.

Under the terms of the scheme, routes will not be extended or altered, additional vehicles will not be introduced, nor will larger vehicles or extra trips using existing vehicles be provided to cater for children travelling on a concessionary basis, no additional State cost will be incurred in covering the cost of providing school transport for children who are not eligible.

The terms of the School Transport Schemes are applied equitably on a national basis.

School Accommodation Provision

325. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a school extension (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36503/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The building project to which the Deputy refers is nearing completion. A small number of snagging and defects issues remain to be resolved. It is expected that Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board will take possession of the extension upon satisfactory completion of these works.

School Accommodation Provision

326. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a

school extension (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36504/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The project to which the Deputy refers is on my Department's six year capital programme. The intention is that the project will be devolved for delivery to an outside agency. Arrangements are currently being made with the agency to facilitate this and, once these arrangements are in place, the next step for the project is the appointment a Design Team who will bring the project through the design and construction phases.

School Accommodation Provision

327. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a school extension (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36505/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): This project is currently at Stage 2B of Architectural Planning. Planning Permission has been received and the Disability Access Certificate and Fire Safety Certificate have been granted.

The Department has recently authorised the project to proceed to pre-qualification of contractors. The school was informed of the timeframe for progression of the project to tender stage and construction and the steps involved.

This major building project is included on the Department's 6 year Construction Programme 2016-21.

School Accommodation Provision

328. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a school extension (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36506/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): This project is currently at Stage 2B of Architectural Planning. Planning Permission has been received and the Disability Access Certificate and Fire Safety Certificate have been granted.

The Department has recently authorised the project to proceed to pre-qualification of contractors. The school was informed of the timeframe for progression of the project to tender stage and construction stage and the steps involved.

This major building project is included on the Department's six year Construction Programme 2016-21.

School Accommodation Provision

329. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a school extension (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36507/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The brief for this project comprises the construction of a new multi-storey extension of approximately 2,972m², and demolition of the existing school.

The project is currently at stage 2a of architectural planning. After the last stakeholders

meeting comments were issued to the design team for follow up. The Department also approved funding for acoustic and landscape consultants to assist with the development of the scheme.

Once Stage 2a is complete, the Department will contact the school with regard to the further progression of the project. This major building project is included on the Department's six year construction programme 2016-21.

School Accommodation Provision

330. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a school extension (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36508/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The project to which the Deputy refers is on my Department's six year capital programme. The intention is that the project will be devolved for delivery to an outside agency. Arrangements are currently being made with the agency to facilitate this and, once these arrangements are in place, the next step for the project is the appointment a design team who will bring the project through the design and construction phases.

Teacher Supply

331. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the Teacher Supply Steering Group last met; the recommendations and actions proposed by the group that should be immediately implemented to improve the situation that many schools experienced in 2017 in obtaining substitute teachers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36526/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Earlier this year I established the teacher supply steering group, to which the Deputy refers. The group is chaired by the Secretary General of my Department and it last met on 29 June.

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 steering 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.

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 and I am aware that some schools experienced difficulties in finding substitute teachers in 2017.

In order to ease the situation, 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.

The steering group is due to meet again on 10 September. At this point the steering group and the working groups reporting to it have met on a number of occasions and I hope to be in a

position to announce further measures to support teacher supply over the coming months.

State Properties

332. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress made to date in releasing his Department's interest in a building (details supplied) which is to be acquired and used as a community facility; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36527/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department received a request to release my interest in the property referred to by the Deputy. I can confirm that I have no objection to the request. The Chief State Solicitor's Office has been instructed in the matter and a deed of surrender has been prepared.

On receipt of an executed declaration of trust which is awaited from the property owner's legal representatives, the process will be finalised and the executed deed of surrender will be issued to the property owner's legal representatives.

Speech and Language Therapy Provision

333. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress being made on the commitment in the Programme for Partnership Government to introduce a new school speech and language therapy service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36528/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In keeping with the commitment contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government to introduce a new school speech and language therapy service, 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 co-ordinated by the National Council for Special Education.

The demonstration project is being developed by a Working Group which includes representatives from the Departments of Education, Children and Youth Affairs, Health, and the Health Service Executive.

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 the Health Service Executive community healthcare organisation 7 region of south west Dublin, Kildare and west Wicklow.

This region has been selected to ensure that the pre-school and in-school therapy model can be tested in both urban and rural locations and with a suitable mix of various types of schools and pre-schools. The schools selected will therefore be from this region.

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

This will include:

- Schools with significant levels of educational disadvantage.
- A mixture of urban, large, and small schools.
- Schools with high levels of support needs as identified under the new special education teaching allocation model.
- Mainstream schools which have special classes
- Special schools with significant levels of therapy support needs.
- Schools of various types including Irish medium schools.

An additional 75 pre-school settings associated with primary schools participating in the project are also 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. Therefore 150 early years or school settings will be included in the pilot. The list of the participating schools and pre schools has now been published on my Departments website.

Decisions in relation to the extension of the service to other areas or counties, or to extend the service nationally, will be taken following an evaluation of the existing informed pilot phase.

Schools Establishment

334. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the development of a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36543/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school to which the Deputy refers is at an advanced stage of the tender process. Subject to no issues arising the project is expected to commence construction in the fourth quarter of 2018.

School Staff

335. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the County Wexford schools with a teaching principal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36545/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Irish education system has certain characteristics that have influenced the evolution of the principal's role. The distribution of the population necessitates a relatively large number of small primary schools. In the case of principals in smaller schools, while management and administrations duties may be smaller in scale than those of larger schools, they must be undertaken in addition to their full-time teaching duties.

The enrolment required for administrative principal in ordinary schools, gaelscoileanna and schools in the Gaeltacht is 176 pupils, or 113 if operating a specialist autism unit.

Schools that have less than this enrolment have teaching principals. 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 4,600 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.

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.

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.

Following is the breakdown of the number of teaching principals in primary schools in Wexford, as requested.

Number of schools with teaching principals:

County:	Number of teaching principals in the 2017/18 school year:
Wexford	59

School Roll Number and name:

Roll No.:	School Name:
05070W	S.N. Baile Muirne
06959G	Clonroche N.S.
09184L	Shielbeggan Convent
10780L	Ballyoughter N.S.
11380A	Caime N.S.
12841P	St Patrick's N.S.
13299E	Glanbrian N.S.
13335F	Court N.S.
13999J	Kilnamanagh N.S.
14492D	Curracloe N.S.
14668O	Ballaghkeene N.S.
14777T	Kilmyshall N.S.
14900P	Gusserane N.S.
14909K	St Leonards N.S.
15177A	Carrigduff N.S.
15354T	Camolin N.S.
15407O	S.N. Baile Thomais

15419V	Oulart N.S.
15937U	Monaseed N.S.
15940J	Tombrack N.S.
15948C	Clologue N.S.
15962T	Ballindaggin N.S.
16072O	Newbawn N.S.
16828U	S.N. Bearn Na h-Aille
16833N	S.N. Cill T-Sile
16992K	Clongeen Mxd N.S.
17117P	S.N. Cul Greine
17194K	S.N. Baile Ui Coileain
17354G	S.N. Padraig
17510R	S.N. Treasa Nfa
17519M	S.N. Caislean Dochraill
Roll No.:	School Name:
17526J	S.N. Abbain
17554O	S.N. Nmh Seosaimh
17610V	S.N. Baile Fada
17612C	St Garvans N.S.
17638U	S.N. Nmh Seosaimh
17656W	S.N. Olibheir Beannuithe
17707N	S.N. Rath An Iubhair
17734Q	S.N. Gallbhaile
17768K	Scoil Ghormáin Naofa
17769M	S.N. Mhuire
17812K	St Marys N.S.
17841R	S.N. Mhuire
17858L	S.N. Coill An Iarainn
18010C	Davidstown Primary School
18133S	Fionntain Naofa N.S.
18191J	S.N. Raithin
18308E	S.N. Moin Na Gcaor
18315B	S.N. Padraig Nfa
18336J	Boolavogue N.S.
18387D	S.N. Catriona Naofa
18687P	Ballyduff N.S.
18714P	St Edans N.S.
18824W	St Iberius N.S.
18839M	S.N. Na Scrine
19528A	Ramsgrange Central N.S.
19741A	Scoil Mhuire
20333P	Wexford ETNS
20458M	New Ross ETNS

Maternity Protection Entitlements

336. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the delay in implementing breastfeeding breaks for teachers as agreed upon by the Teachers Conciliation Council at its meeting of 8 May 2018; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that it was agreed that breastfeeding breaks would be extended until 104 weeks after the birth of the child and that such breaks would be covered under the supervision and substitution scheme; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that under Circular 31/06 employees of the Civil Service have been entitled to breastfeeding breaks since 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36561/18]

337. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the allowance for breastfeeding breaks for children up to two years of age will be increased in view of recent teaching union motions; the position regarding this conditional leave; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36580/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The current provisions for breastfeeding breaks are set out in paragraph 13, chapter 4 – Maternity Protection Entitlements, Terms and Conditions of Employment for Registered Teachers in Recognised Primary and Post Primary Schools – edition 2 issued by my Department. Paragraph 13.1 states:

“13.1 Within a twenty six week period after the birth of the child, a teacher who has returned to work is entitled to one hour per day for the purpose of breastfeeding. The time off, without loss of pay, may be taken as follows:

- (a) one break of 60 minutes, or
- (b) two breaks of 30 minutes each, or
- (c) three breaks of 20 minutes each”

My Department intends to issue a circular on breastfeeding breaks for teachers following recent agreement at the Teachers’ Conciliation Council, TCC. The TCC is part of the scheme of conciliation and arbitration for teachers and was set up to deal with claims and proposals relating to the terms and conditions of employment of teachers. The council is composed of representatives of teachers, school management, the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and is chaired by an official of the Workplace Relations Commission.

School Funding

338. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the full year cost of funding schools in order to allow them to abolish the voluntary contribution; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36588/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department provide funding to support the day to day running costs of schools through capitation and ancillary funding.

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 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.

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.

Voluntary contributions to schools by parents are permissible provided it is made absolutely clear to them that there is no question of compulsion to pay and that, in making a contribution, they are doing so of their own volition and that a child's place in the school or continued enrolment is not dependant on a willingness to make a contribution.

The manner in which voluntary contributions are sought and collected is a matter for school management, however their collection should be such as not to create a situation where either parents or pupils could reasonably infer that the contributions take on a compulsory character. As voluntary contributions are used by schools for many different purposes it is not my intention to seek to abolish them.

The parent and charter bill will provide for parents to be provided better information including in relation to school accounts and the use of voluntary contributions.

Apprenticeship Programmes

339. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the full year cost of abolishing apprenticeship fees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36589/18]

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. For craft apprenticeships, this cost would typically be one third of the €3,000 annual student contribution paid by students attending for the full academic year and so amounts to approximately €1,000 per apprentice per period spent in the IoT.

The cost of not charging the annual student contribution is estimated to be €4.2 million in 2018, although there are no plans to abolish the annual student contribution for apprentices.

Back to Education Allowance

340. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the full year cost of reversing all cuts to back to education funding since 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36590/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): The Back to Education Allowance is a scheme managed by the Department of Employment

Affairs and Social Protection. Questions regarding costs on the scheme should be addressed to the Minister.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

341. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if funding is available to support two ASD units in two primary schools in Mountmellick, County Laois in which there are a number of children in need of the service. [36607/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): This Government is committed to ensuring every child with special educational needs has the opportunity to fulfil their full potential.

In 2018, almost €1.8 billion will be invested in special education, nearly one fifth of the overall education budget, and up 43% since 2011.

The Department's policy is to provide for the inclusive education of children with special educational needs, including autism, ASD, 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 greater proportion of children with ASD attend mainstream class, where they may access additional supports if required.

Some students with ASD, although academically able to access the curriculum in mainstream, may find it too difficult to manage full-time placement there and placement in an ASD special class is an option for them.

Special school placements are provided for other students with ASD and very complex special needs who wouldn't manage in a mainstream school even for part of the week.

The National Council for Special Education is responsible, through its network of special needs organisers, SENOs, for the development and delivery and co-ordination of education services to children with special educational needs, including the establishment of special class and special school placements.

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

Since 2011, the NCSE has increased the number of such classes by over 130% from 548 in 2011 to 1,456 across the country now, of which 1,192 are autism spectrum disorder, ASD, special classes. This network includes 129 ASD early intervention classes, 742 primary ASD classes and 321 post-primary ASD classes in mainstream schools.

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

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

Before approaching a particular school to request the establishment of a special class, SE-

NOs take into account both present and future potential need within the area and must be satisfied that the class is sustainable and appropriately located.

There are currently 23 ASD special classes at primary level in County Laois. While it is not always possible or practical that a special class placement would be available in the child's local school, the NCSE has informed the Department that they are satisfied that there are sufficient ASD special class placements to meet existing demand in County Laois.

In general, children with special educational needs are eligible for school transport if they are attending the nearest special class that is or can be resourced, to meet their special educational needs under my Department's criteria. Most but not all children with special educational needs avail of this support.

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

The NCSE's planning for future projected need for special class provision in all areas of County Laois, including Mountmellick, is an on-going process. Should the NCSE identify the need to establish an ASD special class in the Mountmellick area in the future, it will consider all schools in the area in relation to establishing an ASD special class.

In circumstances where the NCSE have identified the need for to establish a special class in a school, the school can apply to my Department for capital funding where the school is not a position to accommodate a special class within its existing accommodation.

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.

Home School Community Liaison Scheme

342. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if home school liaison officers will be reintroduced in schools, in particular in schools for children with special needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36609/18]

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, almost €1.8 billion will be invested in Special Education, nearly one fifth of the overall Education budget, and up 43% since 2011.

All students with learning difficulties have access to additional teaching support in school. 13,400 Special Education teaching posts are available for allocation to mainstream primary and post primary schools, an increase of over 37% since 2011.

Where children have additional care needs, Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) may be allocated to schools. The SNA scheme is designed to provide recognised schools with additional adult support staff to cater for the care needs of pupils with disabilities in an educational context. The criteria by which SNA support is allocated to pupils is set out in my Department's Circular 0030/2014.

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

Other supports available to schools include:

- Over 1,300 special classes. The number of special classes has risen by 756 since 2011, including 293 new classes in the past two years.
- 124 special schools providing specialist education for approximately 7,500 pupils annually.
- Special school transport arrangements.
- An Assistive Technology scheme to provide specialist equipment.
- Enhanced capitation grants for special schools and special classes attached to mainstream primary and post primary schools.
- Modification of school buildings.
- Special arrangements for State examinations.

The range of investment in special education provision by my Department ensures that all pupils and students with special educational needs can access and participate in education.

The Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) Scheme is a school-based intervention provided to DEIS schools to address the needs of pupils/families in disadvantaged areas through acknowledging and developing the role of the parent as prime educator. My Department has no plans at present to extend this Scheme beyond DEIS Schools.

School Transport Appeals

343. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the case of pupils at a school (detail supplied) will be reviewed; the reason they have not received a place on the bus; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36635/18]

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.

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.

In the 2017/18 school year over 117,000 children, including over 12,000 children with special educational needs, were 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.

Children are generally eligible for school transport if they satisfy the distance criteria and are attending their nearest school.

Children who are eligible for school transport and who completed the application process on time have been issued with tickets for the service operating into the school in question; this service is operating to capacity for the 2018/19 school year.

Children who are not eligible for school transport may apply for transport on a concessionary basis only and will be facilitated where spare seats are available after eligible children have been accommodated. Where the number of ineligible children exceeds the number of spare seats available Bus Éireann will allocate tickets for the spare seats using an agreed selection process.

Under the terms of the scheme, routes will not be extended or altered, additional vehicles will not be introduced, nor will larger vehicles or extra trips using existing vehicles be provided to cater for children travelling on a concessionary basis, no additional State cost will be incurred in covering the cost of providing school transport for children who are not eligible.

The terms of the school transport schemes are applied equitably on a national basis.

Schools Site Acquisitions

344. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the acquisition of a site for a new school (details supplied) at Domacomper campus, Lucan Road; if planning applications will be submitted to facilitate all three schools at the site; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36637/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm for the Deputy that engagement with the vendor is ongoing in respect of outstanding clarifications regarding the proposed school site to which the Deputy refers. Therefore, the appointment of a design team, and in turn, architectural planning, cannot be progressed yet but Department officials will work to do so as soon as it is possible.

Schools Building Projects Status

345. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the tendering process has been completed and a contractor appointed to complete school buildings (details supplied); if the proposed Gaelcholáiste will be accommodated on the same site; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36638/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Kildare & Wicklow ETB has received eight expressions of interest for the completion of the project to which the Deputy refers within the timeframe set for receipt of same. These expressions of interest will now inform the pre-qualification process that is underway. The project remains on target to issue tender documents to the relevant contractors on 8th November which is the date that had been identified in the agreed programme for completion of these projects.

KWETB is continuing to examine the options for accommodation for the Gaelcholáiste referred to by the Deputy which will involve consideration of the timing and availability of appropriate infrastructure in the area.

National Training Fund

346. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the expenditure of the National Training Fund levy in grants to industry; and the amount that goes towards the funding of access to Safe Pass courses for workers. [36645/18]

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

The National Training Fund (NTF), which is funded by the National Training Fund levy, was established by the National Training Fund Act, 2000, as a dedicated fund to support the training of those in employment, and those seeking employment. The Act also provides for the funding of research to provide information on existing and likely future skills requirements of the economy.

Funding is provided to both the IDA and Enterprise Ireland under a Training Grants to Industry heading from the NTF. This initiative provides grants to industry in order to up-skill the workforce.

The allocation for 2018 is as follows:

IDA - €3.0m

Enterprise Ireland - €3.5m

Safe Pass is a one day safety awareness programme aimed at construction workers. The aims of the programme are to raise the standard of safety awareness in the construction industry and so that all construction workers after completing the one day awareness programme can make a positive contribution to the prevention of accidents and ill health while working on the site.

The Safe Pass programme, which is operated and managed by SOLAS, is self-financing and therefore does not receive an allocation from the National Training Fund.

Schools Building Projects Status

347. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the new pre-fab classroom will be put in place for a school (details supplied). [36650/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am pleased to confirm to the Deputy that my Department approved the rental of a temporary classroom in February, 2018 to meet the growing needs at the school in question.

The delivery of the project was devolved to the school management authority and it is a matter for them to arrange the installation of the accommodation.

Schools Building Projects Status

348. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the building project at a school (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36667/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that the project brief for the school in question has been finalised and furnished to the Patron who I understand has provided details directly to the school. The project will include the construction of additional classrooms and ancillary accommodation.

My Department will be in further contact with the school authority relating to the commencement of the architectural planning process which will include the appointment of a design team.

Schools Building Projects Status

349. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the building project at a school (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36668/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The major building project referred to by the Deputy is currently at Stage 2b – Detailed Design.

This project was authorised to commence the Pre-Qualification of Contractors in May 2018. My Department has been informed that the Design Team Leader published the contract notice inviting contractors to tender for Pre-Qualification on e-tenders on 2 August 2018 with a closing date for receipt of submissions of 10 September 2018. The pre-qualification and shortlisting of suitable contractors 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 March 2018 my Department issued a letter to the school and its Design Team outlining the projected timeframe for the progression of this project to tender and construction stage and the steps involved.

Schools Building Projects Status

350. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the building project at a school (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36669/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The project to which the Deputy refers has been devolved for delivery to the local Education and Training Board (ETB).

The pre-qualification report from the Design Team is due to be completed and submitted to the ETB in mid October 2018. It is not possible to say exactly when the project will progress until this pre-qualification process has been completed.

Schools Relocation

351. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the planned permanent location of a school (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36670/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm to the Deputy that the school in question is co-located with a post-primary school, in a permanent building, in Craddockstown. This arrangement will continue as an interim measure pending construction of a permanent building for the post-primary school. The Department will be in contact with the patron of the school in question in due course relating to the school's permanent accommodation.

Schools Building Projects Status

352. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the building project at a school (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36671/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school to which the Deputy refers was allocated funding under my Department's Additional Accommodation Scheme to provide four mainstream classrooms.

The project has been devolved to the school authority for delivery. Approval was given to the school authority last June to proceed to the construction stage. It is a matter for the school authority to advance the project accordingly.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

353. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to give consideration to extend the July education programme into August in order to maximise the support to young persons with disabilities and to provide additional respite for their carers; if the scheme can be made applicable to SNAs and-or teachers with specialist knowledge of the relevant disability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36681/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The July Provision Grant Scheme provides funding for an extended school year for children with severe/profound general learning disabilities or children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). Under the scheme, the school year of participating schools is extended by four weeks in July.

Special schools or mainstream schools that have special classes for autism and/or severe and profound learning disability are eligible to participate in the programme.

Each year eligible schools are invited to participate in the Programme. Participation in the scheme by the school is voluntary and subject to the availability of suitably qualified personnel in July.

Where school-based provision is not feasible, eligible students may be granted 40 hours home-based tuition (10 hours for each of the four weeks). Where an eligible school is not participating in the school based programme in 2018, it is open to parents to apply for the home based July Provision Grant Scheme. Details are available on the Department of Education and Skills website <https://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/July-Provision/Home-Based.html>.

As the July Provision scheme provides funding towards an extended school year, the qualification standard for tuition generally reflects that required in a school environment.

The Deputy may be aware that the National Council for Special Education's Policy Advice on Educational Provision for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (2016) included a review of the July Provision Grant Scheme.

The Review, recommends that, as an alternative to the existing scheme, stakeholders should discuss the development of a national day activity scheme that provides a structured, safe, social environment for all students with complex special educational needs for one month of the summer holidays.

My Department has convened an Implementation Group with representatives of the 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 in the coming weeks.

While that work is under way, there are no plans to change the existing July Provision Scheme.

Third Level Fees

354. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a person whose parents are Irish citizens and who has been living and attending school here since the person was six years of age but whose own passport is from outside the EU qualifies for EU fees for higher education; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36687/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The position is that in order to qualify for funding towards tuition fees, students must be first-time undergraduates, hold *inter alia* EU/EEA/Swiss nationality in their own right, and have been ordinarily resident in an EU/EEA/Swiss state for at least three of the five years preceding their entry to an approved third level course.

Where undergraduate students do not qualify for free fees they are required to pay fees to the higher education institution at either an ‘EU rate’ or a higher ‘Non-EU rate’.

The rate of fee is determined by each institution.

School Transport Eligibility

355. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the ongoing uncertainty in a location (details supplied) regarding the school bus ticket lottery; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that it appears no first year students have received transport for the 2018-19 school year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36688/18]

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.

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.

In the 2017/18 school year over 117,000 children, including over 12,000 children with special educational needs, were 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.

Children are generally eligible for school transport if they satisfy the distance criteria and are attending their nearest school.

Children who are eligible for school transport and who have completed the application process on time will be accommodated on school transport services where such services are in operation for the 2018-19 school year.

Children who are not eligible for school transport may apply for transport on a concessionary basis only and will be facilitated where spare seats are available after eligible children have been accommodated. Where the number of ineligible children exceeds the number of spare seats available Bus Éireann will allocate tickets for the spare seats using an agreed selection process.

Under the terms of the scheme, routes will not be extended or altered, additional vehicles will not be introduced, nor will larger vehicles or extra trips using existing vehicles be provided to cater for children travelling on a concessionary basis, no additional State cost will be incurred in covering the cost of providing school transport for children who are not eligible.

The terms of the School Transport Schemes are applied equitably on a national basis.

School Admissions

356. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the case of a person (details supplied) who did not receive a place in their local school will be examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36689/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In relation to school admissions, parents can choose which school to apply to and where the school has places available the pupil should be admitted. However, in schools where there are more applicants than places available a selection process may be necessary.

This selection process and the enrolment policy on which it is based must be non-discriminatory and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants. However, this may result in some pupils not obtaining a place in the school of their first choice.

Section 29 of the Education Act, 1998 provides for an appeal by a parent or guardian to the Secretary General of my Department, or in the case of an Educational Training Board (ETB) school to the ETB in the first instance, where a Board of Management of a school, or a person acting on behalf of the Board, refuses to enrol a student in a school, expels a student or suspends a student for 20 or more days in any school year. Further information on the Section 29 appeals process is available on the Department's website www.education.ie .

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

Schools Building Projects Status

357. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress being made in providing an extension to a school (details supplied) which is now to be delivered in one phase; the likely timeframe for the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36724/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The extension project to which the Deputy refers has been devolved to Limerick & Clare ETB for delivery.

A Service Level Agreement between my Department and the ETB will be signed in the coming days. The next stage in the project is for the ETB to appoint a Design Team who will bring the project through the design and construction phases.

it is not possible to provide a timeline for the project at this early stage.

Teaching Council of Ireland

358. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if teachers' work experience can be considered from the date of their application in view of the delays being experienced by those awaiting teacher registration numbers. [36737/18]

359. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a person (details supplied) can commence their determination of work experience from the date of their application in view of the particular circumstances in the case. [36738/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 358 and 359 together.

The Teaching Council registers teachers in line with the requirements set out under Section 31 of the Teaching Council Act 2001-2015. This requires a teacher to submit an application for registration, provide supporting documentation and complete the vetting process. Where an applicant holds an out-of-State qualification the documentation is assessed under the EU Directive 2005/36/EC as amended. Finalising registration only occurs once the application is fully processed including the qualifications assessment process.

Generally teachers are initially registered with the condition of fulfilling post-qualification professional practice conditions. The teacher is given three years from the date of registration to fulfil these conditions. For teachers who have these conditions attached, it is not possible to commence the fulfilment of these conditions until initial registration is finalised. Should a teacher have previously fulfilled these conditions or an equivalent in a different jurisdiction then the condition can be lifted on submission of the relevant evidence.

Where a teacher has a specific query regarding his/her conditions of registration, queries should be sent to conditions@teachingcouncil.ie.

Schools Refurbishment

360. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an application by the board of management of a school (details supplied) will be facilitated in view of the dilapidated condition of the existing temporary classroom. [36739/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has no recent application on hand in respect of the replacement of prefabricated accommodation at the school referred to.

I can confirm, however, that an application to replace the prefabricated was processed by my Department in 2017. Should the school wish to have that application reviewed, particularly where there may be additional relevant information available, a written request may be submitted to

the Schools Capital Appraisal Section of my Department.

Schools Site Acquisitions

361. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the negotiations to secure a site for a school campus (details supplied). [36740/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy may be aware, the project in respect of the education campus in Buncrana to cater for the schools in question is included in my Department's capital programme.

Officials in my Department continue to liaise with officials in Donegal County Council in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding in relation to the identification and acquisition of a suitable location for the proposed education campus and have identified a preferred site option. Negotiations with the landowner in respect of this proposed acquisition are currently ongoing

Schools Refurbishment

362. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application by a school (details supplied) for the construction of additional permanent accommodation to replace the dilapidated prefabricated accommodation on site and for an additional prefabricated classroom for students with ASD. [36741/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The project to which the Deputy refers has been devolved for delivery to the local Education and Training Board (ETB). It is currently being advanced through architectural planning by the ETB.

In this regard, my Department recently approved the project to proceed to Stage 2(a), which is the developed design stage. It is a matter for the ETB, as the client for the project, to ensure that this is completed as quickly as possible. Once the stage 2(a) submission is approved by my Department, the next step for the ETB's Design Team is to obtain the statutory planning approvals. When these are in place, the project can proceed to tender and construction.

I can also now confirm that my Department has approved temporary accommodation, as an interim measure, to facilitate the establishment of a second ASD class in the school for September 2018.

Schools Refurbishment

363. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application by a school (details supplied) for additional accommodation for woodwork classes. [36742/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I confirm to the Deputy that an application was received from the relevant Education and Training Board (ETB) on behalf of the school in question for additional temporary accommodation to provide for a woodwork room.

I wish to advise that my Department approved funding for the additional accommodation

and this decision was conveyed to both the ETB and the school authority.

Schools Refurbishment

364. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of applications by a school (details supplied) for the extension of its technology room and the provision of a physical education hall. [36743/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): A project involving upgrade works to the technology room in the school referred to by the Deputy has been devolved for delivery to the local Education & Training Board (ETB). The project has recently been tendered by the ETB and a tender report is due to be submitted to the Department shortly.

A further application was subsequently received by my Department in relation to the construction of a PE Hall at the school in question. As my Department's priority is the provision of essential classroom accommodation to meet demographic need, the element of the school's application relating to classroom accommodation was therefore prioritised for consideration. In this regard, my Department approved funding to the school to extend the existing Woodwork room. This building project was also devolved to Donegal ETB for delivery.

Under the National Development Plan (NDP), increased funding has been provided for the school sector capital investment programme. This funding allows for a continued focus on the provision of new permanent school places to keep pace with demographic demand and also provides for an additional focus on the refurbishment of existing school buildings to include the building and modernisation of PE facilities in post-primary schools.

Under the Ireland Project 2040, we will invest €8.4 billion (compared to €4.9 billion in the previous decade) in primary and post primary school buildings. This will include the provision of 50 large scale school building projects and 20,000 school places in state of the art new buildings.

The immediate priority of my Department is providing 20,000 new and replacement school places each year, to ensure that every child has a school place. The government will focus in the medium term on the provision of PE facilities in schools.

School Accommodation Provision

365. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application by a school (details supplied) for the replacement of old prefabricated accommodation. [36744/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has no recent application on hand in respect of the replacement of prefab accommodation at the school referred to.

Schools Building Projects Status

366. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application by a school (details supplied) for the drafting of a brief formulation report that will allow a design team to design and oversee the project of extending the existing school and

refurbishing and reassigning usage of the existing school buildings and rooms. [36745/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, a building project to deliver a major project at the school referred to is included on my Department's 6 Year Capital Programme.

My Department has carried out a technical site visit at the school with a view to developing the project brief. Issues to be considered in the development of the project brief include identifying the preferred location of the buildings (having regard to the available site), the continuance of the existing school whilst construction is underway, decanting considerations and construction traffic access. My Department is in ongoing contact with the relevant authority in the matter.

Schools Refurbishment

367. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application by a school (details supplied) for the refurbishment of the existing school building to be included on the Capital Investment In Schools Programme 2016-2021 and its application for the provision of six general classrooms and a canteen and general practitioner area at the school. [36746/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that an application for a major capital project was received in the Department for refurbishment works. A major project for this school was not included in my Department's 6 year Capital Programme.

To address immediate accommodation needs the relevant ETB submitted an application under the Additional School Accommodation scheme. In this regard, approval was granted for six permanent general classrooms. This project is currently in architectural planning, Stage 1/2a – Preliminary/Developed Design Stage.

Pending the delivery of the permanent accommodation approval was granted for the provision of two temporary classrooms as an interim solution to meet immediate requirements.

School Accommodation Provision

368. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of applications by a school (details supplied) for two new base classrooms and the refurbishment of its existing metalwork room and construction of another. [36747/18]

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

In considering the request, my Department sought additional information. The application can be considered further following receipt of the required information.

School Accommodation Provision

369. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of

an application by a school (details supplied) for additional classroom space and ASD accommodation. [36748/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that funding has been approved for the provision of three resource rooms at the school to which she refers. The project has been devolved for delivery to the school authority so it is now a matter for the Board of Management to advance the project.

School Accommodation Provision

370. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application by a school (details supplied) for additional classroom accommodation. [36749/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm that my Department is in receipt of an application for additional accommodation, from the relevant ETB, on behalf of the school to which the Deputy refers.

Addition information was requested in respect of the application and this was recently received. The application is under consideration and my Department will be in contact with the school authority in the matter shortly.

Schools Building Projects

371. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a mechanism will be put in place in order to fast-track the completion of the construction works at schools (details supplied) in County Cork. [36759/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The projects referred to by the Deputy, which have been devolved to Cork Education and Training Board (CETB) for delivery, were impacted by the liquidation of Sammon Contracting Ireland Ltd.

Officials in my Department are continuing to engage with CETB to consider how the projects can be completed as quickly as possible while also ensuring that the quality and integrity of the projects is fully protected. A number of necessary steps are being taken by CETB in that respect. These steps include fully scoping out the works to be done and carrying out a tender process to identify a replacement contractor for the implementation of those works.

The Design Teams for these two projects are continuing to prepare the schedules of work necessary to complete the projects in that context.

Schools Building Projects

372. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if additional funding will be committed to in order to enable the necessary construction completion works at schools (details supplied) in County Cork. [36760/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The projects referred to by the Deputy, which have been devolved to Cork Education and Training Board (CETB) for delivery, were impacted by the liquidation of Sammon Contracting Ireland Ltd.

Officials in my Department have engaged with CETB, to whom these projects are devolved,

to ensure that the projects are completed as quickly as possible while also ensuring that the quality and integrity of the projects is fully protected. My Department is fully committed to ensuring these projects are completed in that respect, including through the provision of additional funding if necessary.

School Transport Eligibility

373. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reasoning for the catchment area for the village of Tinahely, County Wicklow in relation to the allocation of schools (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36766/18]

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.

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.

In the 2017/18 school year over 117,000 children, including over 12,000 children with special educational needs, were 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.

Children are generally eligible for school transport if they satisfy the distance criteria and are attending their nearest school.

Children who are eligible for school transport and who have completed the application process on time will be accommodated on school transport services where such services are in operation for the 2018/19 school year.

Children who are not eligible for school transport may apply for transport on a concessionary basis only and will be facilitated where spare seats are available after eligible children have been accommodated. Where the number of ineligible children exceeds the number of spare seats available Bus Éireann will allocate tickets for the spare seats using an agreed selection process.

Under the terms of the scheme, routes will not be extended or altered, additional vehicles will not be introduced, nor will larger vehicles or extra trips using existing vehicles be provided to cater for children travelling on a concessionary basis, no additional State cost will be incurred in covering the cost of providing school transport for children who are not eligible.

The terms of the School Transport Schemes are applied equitably on a national basis.

Schools Building Projects Status

374. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the next stage will be introduced for each secondary school in County Wicklow on the school building programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36768/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that the current status of the school projects included on my Department's Construction Pro-

gramme, including the secondary schools in Wicklow, may be viewed on my Department's website www.education.ie. I also wish to advise the Deputy that this information is updated regularly.

School Management

375. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the measures being introduced to assist up to 44 teaching school principals in County Wicklow further to their request to seek one day administrative leave with support provided as recommended by an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36769/18]

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 long-standing 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 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 have been filled, including in schools where the Principal is a "Teaching Principal".

I also 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 are available to 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.

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.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

376. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the schools which have benefitted from the reduction in the pupil -teacher ratio from September 2018. [36801/18]

377. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if schools that are entitled to an extra teacher under the revised pupil-teacher ratio have refused the offer of a teacher; if so, the schools that this applies to; and the reasons for this. [36802/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 376 and 377 together.

The criteria used to allocate teachers to primary schools are published annually on the Department's website. Circular 10/2018 outlines the allocation process for the 2018/19 school year for primary schools. The published criteria also includes the primary staffing schedule, which operates on the basis of enrolment bands and does so in a clear and transparent manner.

For the 2018/19 school year, the staffing schedule at Primary level will operate on a general average of 26 pupils to every 1 teacher (26:1). This is historically the lowest ever allocation ratio at primary level.

The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September. The recruitment and appointment of teachers to fill teaching posts as permitted by the staffing schedule is a matter for the individual Board of Managements of each school.

The Statistics Section of my Department's website contains extensive data relating to pupil enrolment and individual class groupings for all schools at primary level. The most recent published information relates to the 2017/2018 school year.

The information sought by the Deputy is being compiled by the Teacher Allocation section of my Department and will be forwarded to the Deputy shortly.

[Tables].

Health and Safety

378. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to make it compulsory that first aid be a basic requirement in all national schools and secondary schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36811/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I understand that the Dep-

uty is referring to First Aid Training for Teachers and Staff.

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

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.

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."

The HSA in collaboration with the Department published a number of resources specifically for schools to support them in managing health and safety in the school environment.

Schools Building Projects Status

379. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when funds will be released to allow the progression of school building works which have already been approved at a school (details supplied). [36835/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department is in ongoing contact with the school authorities in question relating to the proposed building project at the school. My Department sought additional technical material from the school in support of the application and the material has been provided. This is currently being considered and my Department will be in further contact with the school when a decision on the application has been finalised.

Student Grant Scheme Representations

380. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the case of a person (details supplied) will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36845/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As part of a comprehensive customer service and communications strategy provided by Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI), to ensure that all necessary avenues are open to applicants to receive the information they need, a dedicated email and phone line service is provided by SUSI for Oireachtas members. This was established to meet an identified need for applicants who choose to engage the assistance of their public representatives in making enquiries about their grant applications.

This service complements the established channels provided by SUSI which include online application tracking, a dedicated website, a telephone helpdesk, email and social media, including Facebook and Twitter.

Enquiries may be emailed direct to SUSI at oireachtas@susi.ie. Staff in SUSI are responding to email queries within a matter of days.

School Transport Applications Data

381. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of applications for special needs transport to schools outstanding and not processed as of 31 August 2018. [36846/18]

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.

In the 2017/18 school year over 117,000 children, including over 12,000 children with special educational needs, were 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.

Over 2,700 applications for school transport for children with special educational needs have been received and processed to date for the 2018/19 school year; Bus Éireann has advised that transport arrangements are being finalised for some 500 of these applicants.

School Placement

382. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the fact that children in Ashbourne, County Meath are unable to secure school places; his plans to provide further school places in Ashbourne; and the outcome of his officials' discussions with the local school principals. [36849/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Every year, my Department ensures that there is a school place or adequate educational provision for every child in the country. This includes meeting the September 2018 accommodation needs of primary school pupils in the Ashbourne area.

My Department has had extensive engagement with the relevant stakeholders in relation to the immediate needs in the Ashbourne area.

My Department is also undertaking a review of the Ashbourne school planning area with regard to determining the need for any further primary school provision in the future and it is anticipated that this review will be completed in October.

Residential Institutions Statutory Fund

383. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the outstanding moneys owed by religious bodies in respect of the 2002 indemnity agreement; the steps he is taking to ensure payment of these debts; the timeframe to which he is working; and if he will

make a statement on the matter. [36860/18]

384. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the outstanding moneys owed by religious bodies in respect of the 2009 redress agreement; the steps he is taking to ensure payment of these debts; the timeframe to which he is working; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36861/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 383 and 384 together.

The current position on the contributions made by the religious congregations is set out in the attached update provided to the Public Accounts Committee at the end of July and which is also published on the Department's website.

Schools Site Acquisitions

385. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the need for a secondary school in Duleek, County Meath. [36865/18]

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 school planning area (in which Duleek is located) and Laytown school planning area 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.

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

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

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

Taking into account all of the above, decisions will then be made as part of the site acquisition process in relation to appropriate sites for all the schools announced, including the school referred to by the Deputy.

Schools Site Acquisitions

386. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding a new primary school for Dunshaughlin, County Meath. [36866/18]

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 a new 8 classroom primary school to serve the Dunshaughlin

school planning area to be established in 2019. This announcement follows nationwide, demographic exercises carried out by my Department into the future need for primary and post-primary schools across the country.

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 Patronage Process for the primary schools to be established in 2019, including the new primary school referred to by the Deputy, will commence later this year.

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.

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 maximise the use of sites already in my ownership and of available properties in the ownership of other State bodies, where these are considered suitable.

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

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

Schools Building Projects Status

387. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding an extension to a school (details supplied) and the tender and construction project for same. [36867/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The project to which the Deputy refers has been approved and devolved for delivery to the local Education and Training Board (ETB) under my Department's Additional Accommodation Scheme. The design team that the ETB has appointed for this project is currently preparing tender documentation. The completion of this documentation will allow the process of tendering for the completion of the

contract to begin. This is expected to take place before the end of October. Once this tendering process is complete, the works can then proceed to site.

Education Policy

388. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department will continue to participate in the OECD's learning environments evaluation programme. [36899/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to confirm to the Deputy that my Department will continue to participate in the OECDs learning environments evaluation programme and a letter was issued to the OECD on 29th August confirming this.

Special Educational Needs Data

389. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of children with special needs passed the age of six on 1 June 2018 who are awaiting a primary school place. [36900/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): This Government is committed to ensuring every child with special educational needs has the opportunity to fulfil their full potential.

In 2018, almost €1.8 billion will be invested in Special Education, nearly one fifth of the overall Education budget, and up 43% since 2011.

The Department's policy is to provide for the inclusive education of children with special educational needs 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 Deputy will be aware that all children must be enrolled in the primary school system, whether through placement in mainstream classes, in special classes or in special schools in the September prior to their sixth birthday.

The greater proportion of children with special education needs attend mainstream class, where they may access additional supports if required.

Some students with special education needs, although academically able to access the curriculum in mainstream, may find it too difficult to manage full-time placement there and placement in a special class is an option for them.

Special school placements are provided for other students with very complex special needs who wouldn't manage in a mainstream school even for part of the week.

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

The 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 class and special school placements.

The NCSE and my Department work closely together to address issues in specialised provision that arise from time in time at local levels and also 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.

To this end my Department and the NCSE have convened a working group to put in place a new working protocol to ensure that there is effective pro-active planning and timely delivery of specialist educational places for students in special classes and special schools.

The focus of the working group is to guide the development of necessary placements in schools in the short, medium and longer terms to meet the anticipated needs of pupils and to ensure that any necessary school building or refurbishment and school transport considerations are resolved as early as possible so that placement options can be accessed where and when they are needed.

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

The Deputy may be aware that the Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018 was signed by the President on 18 July 2018 and will, when commenced, assist parents to more easily access local schools and to enrol their children in a school that meets their needs.

When commenced, the Act will also, based on reports and advice from the NCSE, provide a power for the Minister to direct a school to make additional provision in respect of children with special educational needs.

The direction by me will be preceded by a number of steps to allow for engagement between myself, the NCSE, the Board of Management and Patron and where the owner is not the Patron, the owner of a school.

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

Since 2011, the NCSE has increased the number of special classes by over 130% from 548 in 2011 to 1,456 across the country now. In addition there are currently 124 Special schools of which provide 7,872 placements for children with very complex needs.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) will continue to establish further specialised placements during the school year where such need has been identified.

In circumstances, where there is no placement available for a child with Special Educational Needs, my Department can provide Home Tuition grant funding towards the provision of 20 hours home tuition per week as an interim measure until the NCSE confirms that a placement is available.

Applications can be made at any point of the school year, based on when the child receives a diagnosis and recommendation for a specialised placement.

Over the course of the 2017/18 school year, 61 children with special education needs over the age of 6 availed of this interim provision. Statistics for the current school year are not readily available. While the scheme has commenced, Statistics have yet to emerge as the Department has only begun to receive applications under the 2018/19 scheme.

Parents/Guardians who may need advice or are experiencing difficulties in locating a school placement, including special class placement, should contact their local Special Educational

Needs Organiser (SENO) who can assist in identifying an appropriate educational placement for their child. Contact details are available at <http://ncse.ie/seno-contact-list>.

The NCSE also works in collaboration with the Educational Welfare Services (EWS) of the Child and Family Agency which is the statutory agency that can assist parents who are experiencing difficulty in securing a school place for their child or can offer assistance where a child is out of school. The local service is delivered through the national network of Educational Welfare Officers (EWO). Contact details are available at <http://www.tusla.ie/get-in-touch/education-and-welfare/>.

Schools Building Projects Status

390. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the proposed new development for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36902/18]

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.

In June 2018, the school and its design team was authorised to commence the prequalification process to select a shortlist of contractors for tender stage. Pre-qualification normally takes between 8 and 12 weeks to complete.

Once the prequalification process is complete the Department will be in contact with the Board of Management with a view to progressing the project to tender stage.

In March 2018 my Department issued a letter to the school and its Design Team outlining the projected timeframe for the progression of this project to tender and construction stage and the steps involved.

Apprenticeship Programmes

391. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the review SOLAS was to commission on pathways to participation in apprenticeship, including the participation of persons with a disability; his plans for developing apprenticeship opportunities for persons with disabilities; and when this will be completed. [36916/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): As set out in the Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship in Ireland, SOLAS is currently reviewing pathways to participation in apprenticeship, including for people with disabilities. The review will identify any barriers that may exist to participation in an apprenticeship programme. The purpose of the review is to ensure that our national apprenticeship system is more reflective of the range and diversity of our population, more inclusive of diverse backgrounds and abilities and that apprenticeship opportunities are more readily accessible to all. The review will result in the publication of actions in this area in the coming weeks, along with the background research.

Insurance Coverage

392. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the engagement his Department has had with the insurance industry regarding the provision of public liability insurance for primary and secondary schools in respect of accidents in sport and play yards; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that some schools now ban pupils from running during play and the detrimental effect this has on children's exercise; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36956/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Responsibility for procurement of insurance and payment of same rests with Boards of Management and the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) in respect of schools operated by them. If a particular school has a query in relation to the cost of insurance it should raise this directly with its insurance provider.

Boards of Management and ETBs should take a proactive approach when it comes to sourcing insurance in order to ensure best value is obtained and to ensure compliance with public procurement procedures. The Schools Procurement Unit which has a national remit is available to advise and assist schools in relation to procurement matters.

It is my view that it is important for children to avail of the opportunity to exercise at school and that children should be able to run and move freely in the school yard unless there are very compelling reasons for individual schools to prohibit such activity.

The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 sets out the responsibilities on individual school management authorities to have a safety statement in place in their schools. It is also a matter for school authorities to determine school policies, taking into account any health and safety risks to children running in the school yard and to put appropriate safeguards in place to mitigate any potential risk to the school community.

As part of the management of the risks there is an onus on Boards of Management and the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) in respect of schools operated by them to ensure, as appropriate, that they have put in place comprehensive insurance cover for schools. Boards are advised by my Department to ensure that all such insurances are effected and maintained as are necessary to safeguard the school, the Board and the Trustees against all public liability. Under the provisions of the Education Act, 1998 the Board of Management is the body charged with the direct governance of a school.

Schools are required to take all reasonable precautions to ensure the safety of pupils and responsibility for the appropriate supervision of students is therefore a matter for the individual Board of Management. While appreciating that it is not always possible to eliminate all risks, it should nevertheless be possible to manage them in such a manner that pupils can run in school yards provided it is done in an orderly and supervised manner.

School Equipment

393. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the policy requirement for a number of issues (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36964/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The decision to use tablet devices is a matter for the Board of Management of a school. Where the introduction of new technology is planned, consultation with members of the school community including parents is advised. The cost and other implications must be fully considered by the Boards of Management before a decision is made.

An advice sheet on the adoption of tablets in schools is available on the PDST-Technology in Education (PDST-TIE) website, detailing what tablets can offer a school, educational considerations, purchasing considerations and software.

It is a matter for the Board of Management of each individual school to decide on its own policy in relation to the use of textbooks in the school. Individual schools should adopt a cost-conscious approach to the selection of books in their classes.

The vital contribution of the library service to literacy and numeracy and education more broadly is reflected in the National Strategy for Literacy and Numeracy 2011-2020. The strategy, which was reviewed in 2017, includes as an action the promotion of library usage as a means of supporting family literacy, and ensuring that all children, through their school and parents, are motivated to avail of membership of a public library.

In relation to textbook costs an agreement was reached with the Irish Educational Publisher's Association which resulted in the agreement of a Code of Practice. The Code commits the publishers to limit the publication of new editions and to maintaining editions of books in print unchanged for at least six years. The publishers have also given assurances that they will sell textbooks to schools at discounts so that schools can purchase textbooks in bulk to stock book rental schemes.

School book rental schemes have an important role to play in reducing the cost of school books for parents. Circa. 96% of primary schools and 68% of post-primary schools operate a book rental scheme.

My Department supports the operation of book rental schemes through the funding provided under its school books grant scheme. Under this scheme, my Department provides funding of €16.7 million annually to all recognised primary and post-primary schools in the free education scheme. In addition €15.7 million seed capital was provided over three years to support the establishment of book rental schemes in primary schools.

One of the actions as part of the Action Plan for Education is to strengthen the focus on reducing school costs for parents by increasing the financial support for book rental schemes, in order to reduce/eliminate school book costs for parents as resources permit.

My Department has published a circular to school authorities and ETBs regarding measures to be adopted by schools to reduce the costs which include the provision of a book rental scheme and the phasing out of the use of workbooks which cannot be reused. The circular can be accessed on my Department's website at https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0032_2017.pdf.

Education Funding

394. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to extend enhanced capitation services to children in second level as is the case at primary level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36965/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Capitation funding is intended to contribute towards the cost of heating, lighting, cleaning, insurance, general up-keep and general teaching aids required in schools. Capitation grants are paid on a per pupil basis.

Special enhanced capitation rates are paid in respect of pupils with special needs who attend special schools or primary special classes dedicated to children with particular special needs.

These classes have a lower Pupil Teacher ratio and as such the unit cost per pupil is higher.

However, at Post Primary level, enhanced capitation rates are currently only paid in respect of pupils enrolled in special classes for mild or moderate general learning disability.

The Deputy may be aware that the National Council for Special Education's Policy Advice on Educational Provision for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (2016) included a recommendation to extend the enhanced level of capitation grant to post-primary schools with special classes on the same basis as primary schools to assist them with the increased running costs associated with these classes.

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 have already been partially or substantially implemented, work is planned on the implementation of the remaining recommendations.

I have asked my officials to prepare a progress report setting out expected timeframes for full implementation and I expect that report in the coming weeks.

Residential Institutions Statutory Fund

395. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the dealings he has had with religious orders that made agreements with the State in respect of the provision of funds or property set aside for compensation for children who were in their care; the amount committed; the amount owed by each religious order, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36970/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The current position with the contributions made by religious congregations is set out in the update which was provided to the Public Accounts Committee at the end of July and which is also published on my Department's website. The update can be found at

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Brexit Issues

396. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will clarify the right of residence here after Brexit of US citizens married to British citizens here; and his plans to legislate for the issue if needed. [35647/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As I am sure that the Deputy will appreciate, negotiations on the future post-withdrawal relationship between the European Union and the United Kingdom are on-going and I am not in position to speculate as to the final outcome of these negotiations, including any transitional arrangements and timetables. However, my officials are aware of the general matter you have raised and are considering what arrangements will need to be put in place.

Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission Investigations

397. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason the medical records of a person (details supplied) will not be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36307/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, issues relating to the formal sharing of information between An Garda Síochána and the GSOC for investigative purposes are of an operational nature and, as such, the Minister has no role in this process.

Pursuant to the Garda Síochána Act 2005, An Garda Síochána and GSOC have developed an extensive protocol which governs the sharing of information relevant to an active investigation being conducted by the Commission. This protocol sets out the responsibilities of both parties and provides a detailed process of escalation where certain records or information has not yet been provided.

It is my understanding that the matter referred to by the Deputy is currently being progressed in accordance with the agreed protocol on the provision of information to GSOC. In the circumstances, it would not be appropriate to comment further in the matter.

Garda Vetting

398. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if changes to the vetting criteria will be considered for private bus providers in contract with Bus Éireann to provide school transport services (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36334/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, the primary purpose of the employment vetting carried out by the Garda National Vetting Bureau is to seek to ensure the safety of children and vulnerable adults. Vetting is carried out by An Garda Síochána primarily in accordance with the provisions of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012-2016.

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

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

I am pleased to advise the Deputy that in general the vetting process is working well. At present, 80% of overall vetting applications are being processed by the National Vetting Bureau in five working days. This efficiency has been achieved by the deployment of the e-vetting system which facilitates the on-line processing of applications for vetting from registered organisations. The e-vetting system is available to all registered organisations and the Garda authorities are ready to assist those organisations who are not yet using the e-vetting system to do so. In circumstances where there is such a sustained reduction in processing times, the issue of vetting

“transferability” is largely obviated.

That said, the Deputy will wish to be aware that the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012-2016 provides at section 12 for certain circumstances where organisations can share a single vetting disclosure where this is agreed to by the vetting applicant and by the organisations in question.

Services for People with Disabilities

399. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress made towards meeting Ireland’s responsibilities and obligations under Article 33 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities that specifically concern designating one or more focal points within Government for matters relating to the implementation of the present convention (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36582/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy Finian McGrath): As the Deputy is aware, Article 33 of the Convention requires State Parties to designate a focal point within Government for matters relating to the implementation of the Convention, and to establish a framework, including one or more independent mechanisms, to promote, protect and monitor implementation of the CRPD. It also requires the involvement and participation of civil society, in particular, persons with disabilities, in the monitoring process.

The Equality Division in the Department of Justice and Equality has been designated as the focal point. Equality Division has policy responsibility for disability and equality, and domestic human and fundamental rights. The Division provides the Secretariat to the National Disability Strategy Implementation Group (NDSIG) which I chair.

The monitoring framework will include both the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) and the National Disability Authority (NDA) to be governed by a formal Memorandum of Understanding. The IHREC Act 2014 was designed to ensure that IHREC, as Ireland’s National Human Rights Institution, fully meets the standard of independence in accordance with the Paris Principles, and is best placed to make periodic independent reports to the UN, supported by progress assessments and statistical information supplied by the NDA. The NDA has expertise and information resources in relation to reporting on disability issues.

Ongoing progress and implementation will be internally monitored through the structures in place to support the implementation of the National Disability Inclusion Strategy (NDIS). The NDIS was published on 14 July 2017 and its implementation is monitored by a Steering Group which comprises the key departments, the National Disability Authority and the Disability Stakeholders Group. The Strategy is an all-of-Government approach and focuses on eight key themes including equality and choice, the provision of services, accommodation, health, employment, transport and education.

Direct Provision Data

400. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the amount provided to each reception and integration centre, by centre and region, in each of the years from 2011 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36653/18]

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

All accommodation centres for those persons seeking protection, whether State-owned or privately owned, are operated by commercial companies. There are currently 35 accommodation centres being operated under the direct provision system.

Extensive and detailed information on the amount paid by my Department to each company contracted to provide direct provision accommodation every year up to and including 2015 can be found on the RIA website www.ria.gov.ie under the 'Contract Values' section of the website - <http://www.ria.gov.ie/en/RIA/Pages/ContractValues>.

This is in accordance with the Reception & Integration Agency's policy on disclosure of financial information which was agreed with the Office of the Information Commissioner. The Deputy will appreciate that it is not appropriate to provide values for current contracts entered into by my Department. Negotiations take place with a number of commercial entities on an on-going basis with a clear focus on achieving the best value for money in respect of each contract. It is not in the interests of yielding best value for the taxpayer that details of current individual contracts are made available to other commercial bodies who are, or may be in the future, engaged in these negotiations.

The Deputy will also wish to be aware that my Department, in association with the Office of Government Procurement, GP is in the process of running an open, transparent, competitive tender process for the provision of accommodation and related services in the Sligo area. Details of this competition can be found on the etenders website. Further competitions for all other accommodation centres will be run into the future.

EU Migration Crisis

401. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on a change to the EU's migration policy following a report from the UNHCR (details supplied) which has reported an increased proportion of persons dying at sea among those attempting to enter the EU; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36796/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): While the overall number of deaths at sea in the Mediterranean has dropped significantly over the past twelve months, any death at sea is tragic. Ireland supports efforts made by the European Union and its Member States to put a stop to the unnecessary deaths in the Mediterranean. Ireland has been active in Search and Rescue missions in the Mediterranean since 2015, first through Operation Pontus, a bilateral agreement between Ireland and Italy running in parallel to Operation Sophia. Ireland has been a full member of Operation Sophia since 2017. Since 2015, Irish naval vessels have rescued thousands of migrants at sea.

In its conclusions of 28 June, the European Council, following a meeting which was attended by the Taoiseach, reconfirmed that a functioning EU policy on migration relies on a comprehensive approach to migration which combines effective controls of the EU's external borders, increased external action as well as the internal aspects of migration.

In order to break the business model of the smugglers and prevent loss of life at sea, the Council agreed that a new approach is required in relation to those who are saved in Search and Rescue operations. In this regard, the European Council called on the Council and the Commission to explore the concept of regional disembarkation platforms, in cooperation with third countries as well as UNHCR and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). Furthermore, the European Council agreed to set up 'controlled centres' in willing Member States to allow for rapid processing to distinguish between irregular migrants and those in need

of international protection.

Discussions on these measures are underway and I and my officials are playing an active role in their development. The Council itself confirmed in its conclusions that any centres established must operate in full compliance with international law. In advance of the measures being agreed, Ireland has on three separate occasions over the summer and in an act of humanitarian assistance and collegiality with other Member States, made pledges to take migrants who were rescued in the Mediterranean Sea and to process their applications for international protection.

In addition to supporting the rescue of migrants at sea, and our active engagement in the ongoing discussions on regional disembarkation and ‘controlled’ centres, Ireland supports other measures to address the root causes of irregular migration, such as through the EU’s efforts to stabilise Libya and neighbouring countries in North and West Africa, both politically and economically. The recently established AU-EU-UN Taskforce on Libya has seen some early successes in its efforts to support migrants in Libya.

Ireland continues to support numerous humanitarian and developmental programmes in developing Partner Countries through Irish Aid. Ireland continues to support the EU’s Trust Fund for Africa, increasing our pledge to fifteen million euro. This is the third highest per capita contribution by an EU Member State. The Trust Fund is of paramount importance in addressing the root causes of irregular migration in Africa, through its effort, amongst other things, to stabilise Libya and neighbouring countries and to improve the socioeconomic situation in Africa.

Ireland supports the opening up of new legal migratory pathways to Europe for third country nationals, as part of efforts to reduce irregular migration and to reduce the numbers of migrants making dangerous journeys across the Mediterranean Sea. Ireland expects to be an active participant in current and future pledges in respect of refugees and other vulnerable persons in need of protection. In this regard, we have pledged to resettle 600 refugees each year in 2018 and 2019 under the EU-UNHCR pledging exercise for the two-year period.

Visa Applications

402. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there has been a change in the criteria for Columbian and Venezuelan nationals applying for visas to study here for the year 2018-19; the existing criteria for Columbian and Venezuelan students to successfully apply for a visa; the number of such applications; the requirements they must satisfy in terms of proving they will return to their home country when they complete their studies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36958/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that there has been no change in the requirements on any persons applying for Irish study visas.

Further information is generally available on the INIS *website* www.inis.gov.ie. However, it should be noted that the information on the website does not limit the discretion of a visa officer from seeking additional information. In such circumstances, it is not possible to give comprehensive details as each visa application is assessed on its merits and circumstances can inevitably vary from one individual to another.

The applicant’s intention to return to their home country can be established by showing that the person has an obligation to return home for economic, social or family reasons.

Finally, I am advised that 112 study visa applications were received from Columbian and 40

from Venezuelan nationals thus far this year (up to 31 August).

Asylum Applications

403. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of an application by a person (details supplied) for asylum here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35425/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned is the subject of a Deportation Order, issued by letter dated 20 August 2018. This Order requires the person concerned to remove themselves from the State and remain outside the State. The enforcement of the Deportation Order is a matter for the Garda National Immigration Bureau.

Failure to leave the State by 20 September 2018 means the person concerned is liable to be deported and is required to 'present' at the Offices of the Garda National Immigration Bureau on 26 September 2018, to make arrangements for deportation from the State.

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

Deportation Orders

404. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if relevant responses setting out the residency history of a person (details supplied) here have been received and examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35433/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Services (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned is the subject of a Deportation Order made on 12 November 2008, following the refusal of the international protection claim made by the person concerned and the detailed consideration of their case under Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended). That Order remains valid and in place.

Representations were received from the person concerned requesting that the Deportation Order be revoked, pursuant to the provisions of Section 3(11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended). Following the consideration of that request, a decision was taken in August 2016 that the Deportation Order should be affirmed and this decision was communicated to the person concerned by registered post dated 04 August 2016.

It is open to the person concerned to submit further representations requesting that the Deportation Order be revoked, pursuant to Section 3(11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended). However, I wish to make clear that such an application would require substantial grounds to be successful.

The Deputy might wish to note that the effect of a Deportation Order is that the person named on the Order is legally obliged to leave the State and to remain outside of the State. The enforcement of the Deportation Order in this case is now an operational matter for the Garda

National Immigration Bureau.

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

Garda Stations

405. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda stations open in the Louth Garda division in each year since 2009; and the name of each. [35440/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will appreciate that the Garda Commissioner is primarily responsible for the effective and efficient use of the resources available to An Garda Síochána, including responsibility for the formulation of proposals in relation to the opening and closing of Garda stations, taking into account crime trends and policing priorities, to ensure that the best possible use is made of these resources. Further, the programme of replacement and refurbishment of Garda accommodation is progressed by the Garda authorities working in close cooperation with the Office of Public Works, which has responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation. As Minister, I have no direct role in these matters.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the Garda estate currently includes 565 Garda Stations, following the official opening of the new Western Region Headquarters, Galway in July 2018.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that Louth Garda Division currently comprises 13 Garda stations as follows: Ardee, Blackrock, Carlingford, Castlebellingham, Clogherhead, Colton, Drogheda, Dromad, Dundalk, Dunleer, Hackballscross, Louth and Omeath.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the Garda District and Station Rationalisation Programme developed and implemented in 2012 and 2013 resulted in the closure of some 139 Garda stations nationwide, however, I understand there were no closures in the Louth Division under the programme.

Garda Information and Communications Technology

406. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda stations in the Louth Garda division that had access to broadband in each year since 2009. [35441/18]

407. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda stations in the Louth Garda division that had access to high-speed broadband in each year since 2009. [35442/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 406 and 407 together.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is primarily responsible for the

effective and efficient use of the resources available to An Garda Síochána. Further, decisions in relation to the provision and allocation of Garda equipment and resources, including ICT resources and the networking of Garda stations, are matters for the Garda Commissioner in light of availability of resources and his identified operational demands. As Minister, I have no direct role in these matters.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that broadband networks and services are used to connect stations to the Garda network for official purposes. All of the connections to the Garda stations are managed in Telecommunications Division to ensure the speed of the network connection meets the requirements of the particular location.

I am further informed by the Garda authorities that there are 13 Garda Stations in the Louth Division. I understand that to provide details by year would be a voluminous task and would require a manual check of billing for a ten year period.

However, the Garda authorities have confirmed that 9 stations were connected to the Garda network in the Louth Division as of 2014. 4 additional stations in the Division have been connected to the Garda network since that time. As such, the Garda authorities have confirmed that all 13 stations in the Louth Division are now connected to the Garda network.

Garda Stations

408. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda stations open in the Meath Garda division in each year since 2009; and the name of each. [35443/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will appreciate that the Garda Commissioner is primarily responsible for the effective and efficient use of the resources available to An Garda Síochána, including responsibility for the formulation of proposals in relation to the opening and closing of Garda stations, taking into account crime trends and policing priorities, to ensure that the best possible use is made of these resources. Further, the programme of replacement and refurbishment of Garda accommodation is progressed by the Garda authorities working in close cooperation with the Office of Public Works, which has responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation. As Minister, I have no direct role in these matters.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the Garda estate currently includes 565 Garda Stations, following the official opening of the new Western Region Headquarters, Galway in July 2018.

I am further informed by the Garda authorities that the Meath Division currently comprises 16 Garda stations as follows: Ashbourne, Athboy, Ballivor, Duleek, Dunboyne, Dunshaughlin, Enfield, Kells, Laytown, Longwood, Navan, Nobber, Oldcastle, Slane, Summerhill and Trim.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the Garda District and Station Rationalisation Programme developed and implemented in 2012 and 2013 resulted in the closure of some 139 Garda stations nationwide.

I understand that 2 Garda stations in Meath Division were closed as part of that rationalisation programme, as follows: Crossakiel and Kilmessan (closed in 2013).

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the closures implemented nationally under the rationalisation programme allowed front line Garda to be managed and deployed with greater

mobility, greater flexibility and in a more focused fashion, particularly with regard to targeted police operations.

Garda Information and Communications Technology

409. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda stations in the Meath Garda division that had access to broadband in each year since 2009. [35444/18]

410. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda stations in the Meath Garda division that had access to high-speed broadband in each year since 2009. [35445/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 409 and 410 together.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is primarily responsible for the effective and efficient use of the resources available to An Garda Síochána. Further, decisions in relation to the provision and allocation of Garda equipment and resources, including ICT resources and the networking of Garda stations, are matters for the Garda Commissioner in light of availability of resources and his identified operational demands. As Minister, I have no direct role in these matters.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that broadband networks and services are used to connect stations to the Garda network for official purposes. All of the connections to the Garda stations are managed in Telecommunications Division to ensure the speed of the network connection meets the requirements of the particular location.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that there are 16 Garda Stations in the Meath Division. I understand that to provide details of connection by year would be a voluminous task and would require a manual check of billing for a ten year period.

However the Garda authorities have confirmed that 14 stations were connected to the Garda network in the Meath Division as of 2014. 2 additional stations in the Division have been connected to the Garda network since that time. As such, the Garda authorities have confirmed that all 16 stations in the Meath Division are now connected to the Garda network.

Garda Resources

411. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the capital investment being made in Garda resources in counties Cavan, Monaghan and Meath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35463/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will be aware that there has been very significant investment in Garda resources across the State in recent years and €1.65 billion has been allocated to the Garda Vote for 2018.

For example, €342 million is being invested in Garda ICT infrastructure between 2016 and 2021 in support of the Modernisation and Renewal Programme, to enable An Garda Síochána to work more effectively and deploy the latest technologies in the fight against crime.

€46 million has been provided for investment in the Garda fleet under the 2016 – 2021 capi-

tal plan, in addition to the investment of almost €30 million in the period 2013 to 2015 to ensure that An Garda Síochána has a modern, effective and fit-for-purpose fleet and can be mobile, visible and responsive on the roads and in the community.

A further €60 million exchequer funding underpins the Garda Building and Refurbishment Programme, which is a 5-year programme based on agreed Garda priorities benefitting over 30 locations around the country. This is additional to the investment of approximately €100 million in development of 3 major new Divisional and Regional Headquarters recently completed and entered into operational use at Galway, Wexford and Kevin Street Dublin.

The Deputy will further appreciate that it is the Commissioner who is responsible for managing and controlling generally the administration and business of An Garda Síochána, including the efficient and effective use of these resources. The programme of replacement and refurbishment of Garda accommodation is progressed by the Garda authorities working in close cooperation with the Office of Public Works (OPW). Decisions in relation to the provision and allocation of Garda vehicles are a matter for the Commissioner in the light of his identified operational demands and the availability of resources.

As Minister, I have no direct role in these matters. However I have been informed by the Garda authorities that Garda management keeps the distribution of resources (including allocation of Garda vehicles) under continual review so as to ensure their optimum use.

In respect of the Cavan / Monaghan Division, I am informed by the Garda authorities that under the Garda Building and Refurbishment Programme 2016-2021, a new Garda station will be constructed in Bailieborough, County Cavan. I am informed that the planning application for the development of the new Station was lodged in August 2018. Until planning, the required public procurement process and contract award are completed, it is not possible to give a definitive date for completion of the construction of the new station.

In advance of that new development, essential remediation works at the existing station at Bailieborough were also completed in 2016. The works involved enhancements to the public office and safety improvements throughout the building.

In addition, the Deputy will be aware that the Programme for a Partnership Government commits to a pilot scheme to reopen 6 Garda stations to determine possible positive impacts that such openings will have on criminal activity, with special emphasis on burglaries, theft and public order. The Commissioner's final report in that regard recommends that Bawnboy Garda Station in County Cavan be included in the pilot. The OPW and Commissioner are engaging in relation to the works required in that regard.

I am advised by the Garda authorities that the strength of the Garda fleet in the Cavan/Monaghan Division as at 31 July 2018 is 58 vehicles.

I understand that provision has been made to purchase an additional 25 vehicles for the Northern Region in 2018, of which 4 have been allocated to the Cavan/Monaghan Division as at 31 July 2018. The exact allocation of these vehicles will be determined by Assistant Commissioner for the Northern Region in accordance with operational policing priorities following delivery of these vehicles.

With regard to the Meath Division, provision is made under the Garda Building and Refurbishment Programme 2016-2021 for works at Navan Garda Station, namely the demolition of the existing cell block and the construction of a new cell block and overhead office accommodation. I am advised that An Garda Síochána is actively engaged with the OPW to progress this project.

I am further advised that the strength of the Garda fleet in the Meath Division as at 31 July 2018 is 55 vehicles.

I understand that provision has been made to purchase an additional 23 vehicles for the Eastern Region in 2018, of which 2 have been allocated to the Meath Division as at 31 July 2018. The exact allocation of these vehicles will be determined by Assistant Commissioner for the Eastern Region in accordance with operational policing priorities following delivery of these vehicles.

Separate to the above details specific to the Cavan / Monaghan and Meath Divisions, I am informed that An Garda Síochána seeks to address minor maintenance issues, including refurbishment, as they arise, liaising closely with the OPW in that regard. The progression of any works is subject to funding available and the competing accommodation priorities within An Garda Síochána.

Finally and apart from capital investment, 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. Furthermore when allocations are taking place, comprehensive consultation is carried out with local management. Where a deficiency in resources is identified the matter is considered fully and addressed accordingly.

Departmental Staff Recruitment

412. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the process by which the Secretary General was appointed to his Department; if the position was advertised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35465/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Mr Aidan O’Driscoll was appointed Secretary General of the Department of Justice and Equality by Government Decision on 10 July 2018, having held the position of Secretary General in the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine since 2015. This followed a consultation process to identify a serving Secretary General with the necessary experience and expertise to lead the challenging transformation process in the Department as set out in the first report of the Effectiveness and Renewal Group.

Mr. O’Driscoll brings a wealth of experience to his new role and I look forward to working with him in delivering on the important mandate of the Department of Justice and Equality.

Garda Stations

413. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda stations open in the Cork north and west Garda divisions in each year since 2009; and the name of each. [35473/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will appreciate that the Garda Commissioner is primarily responsible for the effective and efficient use of the resources available to An Garda Síochána, including responsibility for the formulation of proposals in relation to the opening and closing of Garda stations, taking into account crime trends and policing priorities, to ensure that the best possible use is made of these resources. Further, the programme of replacement and refurbishment of Garda accommodation is progressed by

the Garda authorities working in close cooperation with the Office of Public Works, which has responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation. As Minister, I have no direct role in these matters.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the Garda estate currently includes 565 Garda Stations, following the official opening of the new Western Region Headquarters, Galway in July 2018.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the Garda District and Station Rationalisation Programme of 2012 and 2013 resulted in the closure of some 139 Garda stations.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that Cork North Garda Division currently comprises 25 Garda stations as follows: Ballycotton, Ballynoe, Buttevant, Carrigtwohill, Castletown-roche, Charleville, Cloyne, Cobh, Doneraile, Fermoy, Glantaine (Glantane), Kanturk, Kildorrery, Killeagh, Kilworth, Liscarroll, Mallow, Midleton, Milford, Mitchelstown, Newmarket, Rathcormac, Watergrasshill, Whitegate and Youghal.

I understand that one Garda station was closed in Cork North Division as part of the Rationalisation Programme, namely Glenville Garda Station in 2013.

I am further informed by the Garda authorities that Cork West Garda Division currently comprises 32 stations as follows: Ballingeary, Ballinhassig, Ballinneen, Ballydehob, Ballydesmond, Ballyvourney, Baltimore, Bandon, Bantry, Boherbue, Castletownbere, Clonakilty, Coachford, Crookstown, Drimoleague, Drinagh, Dunmanay, Durrus, Glengarriff, Innishannon, Kealkil, Kilbrittain, Kinsale, Macroom, Mill Street, Rathmore, Rathmore, Schull, Skibbereen, Stuake/Donoughmore, Tarleton and Timoleague.

I understand that nine Garda stations were closed in Cork West Division as part of the Rationalisation Programme. In 2012, Ballyfeard, Ballygurteen, Castletownsend, Goleen, Inchigeela and Knocknagree. In 2013, Adrigole, Ballinspittle and Meelin were closed.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the closures implemented nationally under the rationalisation programme have allowed front line Garda to be managed and deployed with greater mobility, greater flexibility and in a more focused fashion, particularly with regard to targeted police operations.

Garda Information and Communications Technology

414. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda stations in the Cork north and west Garda divisions that had access to broadband in each year since 2009. [35474/18]

415. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda stations in the Cork north and west Garda divisions that had access to high-speed broadband in each year since 2009. [35475/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 414 and 415 together.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is primarily responsible for the effective and efficient use of the resources available to An Garda Síochána. Further, decisions in relation to the provision and allocation of Garda equipment and resources, including ICT resources and the networking of Garda stations, are matters for the Garda Commissioner in light

of availability of resources and his identified operational demands. As Minister, I have no direct role in these matters.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that broadband networks and services are used to connect stations to the Garda network for official purposes. All of the connections to the Garda stations are managed in Telecommunications Division to ensure the speed of the network connection meets the requirements of the particular location.

I am further informed by the Garda authorities that there are 25 Garda stations in the Cork North Division and 32 in the Cork West Division. I understand that to provide details by year would be a voluminous task and would require a manual check of billing for a ten year period.

However, the Garda authorities have confirmed that as of 2014 in the Cork North Division there were 11 Garda stations connected to the Garda network. Since that time, a further 8 stations have been connected to the Garda network. This leaves 6 Garda stations in this Division which are currently not networked.

In the Cork West Division, the Garda authorities have confirmed that as of 2014 there were 11 Garda stations connected to the Garda network. Since that time a further 14 stations have been connected to the Garda network, leaving 7 Garda stations in this division which are currently not networked.

I am informed by An Garda Síochána that any member attached to a currently unconnected station can access PULSE at their local district station. Members in non-networked locations can also contact the Garda Information Services Centre (GISC) or an associated networked station if required.

I have further been advised by the Garda authorities that options for providing members attached to the remaining stations not yet networked with local access to Garda ICT services are actively being explored. This includes an assessment of the availability or otherwise of local broadband services and/or the provision of mobile technology.

Probate Data

416. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on whether the legislation affecting probate law needs to be reviewed, strengthened or otherwise reformed in view of the experience of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35492/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will appreciate that it would not be appropriate for me to comment on any specific probate cases. The Probate Office is part of the Courts Service and it deals with non-contentious probate matters. It's functions are to:

- admit wills to proof;
- issue grants of probate and grants of administration;
- preserves probate records for inspection;
- provides certified copies of probate documents; and
- processes court applications to the judge assigned to deal with probate matters.

The Courts Service recently undertook a broad review of the operation of the Probate Office and District Probate Registries. The review involved a wide consultation exercise, including consulting with legal practitioners and customers. The results of the review, which have been endorsed by the Board of the Courts Service, contain a number of recommendations for more effective and efficient delivery of the probate service.

The recommendations include the development of a new ICT platform for the Probate Office and District Probate Registries which will enable online filing of applications for grants of probate and grants of administration. I am informed that a Project Board to oversee the design and implementation of the new platform will be established in the near future.

The Review has also recommended that certain functions should be transferred from the Probate Office to the District Probate Registries and draft Rules of Court are in preparation with a view to giving effect to this recommendation. The intention is to free up resources in the Probate Office in Dublin in order to process more grants of probate and administration.

I should add that additional resources have been allocated to the Probate Office in recent months and this has led to a significant reduction in processing times for applications for grants of representation. At present, the processing time for a solicitor's application is approximately 5 to 6 weeks, while in the case of personal applications the waiting time is 10 to 15 weeks.

Garda Information and Communications Technology

417. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda stations in County Wexford that have no internet access; the locations of same; the proposed timeline to address this dearth of access; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35497/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate decisions in relation to the provision and allocation of Garda resources including ICT resources are a matter for the Garda Commissioner in light of his identified operational demands and the availability of resources and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

I have asked the Garda Commissioner for the specific information requested and I will write to the Deputy directly when I receive it.

Garda Data

418. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 260 of 19 June 2018, when a reply will issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35506/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As outlined in my response to Parliamentary Question No. 260 of 19 June, I have requested the information from the Garda authorities in relation to this matter and I will contact the Deputy as soon as the information is to hand.

Immigration Status

419. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if all re-

quested documentation in respect of an application by a person (details supplied) has now been received; if further documentation is outstanding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35508/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that it wrote to the legal representative of the person concerned on 31 August 2018 in relation to an application for permission to remain in this State. I am further informed that it is open to the person concerned to provide the information and documentary evidence referred to by INIS. The application will be given detailed consideration by INIS upon receipt of the relevant response from the individual concerned

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

Immigration Status

420. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35523/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that it wrote to the person concerned on 3 September 2018 in relation to an application for a change in the conditions of their permission to remain in this State. I am further informed that it is open to the person concerned to provide the information and documentary evidence referred to by INIS. The request will be given detailed consideration by INIS upon receipt of the relevant response from the individual concerned.

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

Immigration Status

421. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35524/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned is a non-visa required national who entered the State in September 2016 and appears to have remained without permission since then.

I am further informed that INIS has no record of an application for residency in the State arising from marriage to an Irish citizen in respect of the person concerned. However, I am advised that it is open to the person concerned to make a written application to the Spouse of Irish National Unit, INIS, P.O. Box 12695, Dublin 2, seeking residency in the State arising from his marriage to an Irish national. Details on the information and documentation required to be provided in support of an application may be found at www.inis.gov.ie.

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

Immigration Status

422. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35525/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that it would appear the person's presence in the State may be unlawful as their most recent permission to remain in the State expired in December, 2011.

The Deputy will appreciate that, under the relevant provisions of the Immigration Act, 2004, a non-national may not be in the State other than within the terms of a permission from the Minister for Justice and Equality. In order to allow for a full examination of the person's circumstances, the person concerned should write to Unit 2, Domestic Residence and Permissions Division, INIS, 13/14 Burgh Quay, Dublin 2 and provide a detailed account and documentary evidence of their personal circumstances since the expiration of their permission to reside in this State.

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

Residency Permits

423. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if an extended stamp 1 or 4 or right to work will be facilitated in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35528/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have been informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned applied on 12 October 2010 for a residence card as a family member of an EU citizen under the provisions of the European Communities (Free Movement of Persons) Regulations 2006 and Directive 2004/38/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council. They stated

at that time that they were the spouse of a citizen of Portugal who was exercising EU Treaty Rights in the State. This application was refused on 19 April 2011.

On 10 May 2011 the person concerned sought a review of the decision to refuse their application. They were informed on 16 August 2011 that their review had been successful. The applicant was provided at that time with permission to remain in the State on a Stamp 4EUFam basis for a period of five years – from 16 August 2011 to 16 August 2016.

The person concerned applied on 06 September 2016 to retain their permission to reside in the State. However, they were advised on 15 July 2017 that their application had been refused. They were informed at that time that the right of a third country national family member to accompany or join an EU citizen in a host Member State is a derived right dependent on the EU citizen residing in the State in exercise of their EU Treaty Rights in accordance with the provisions of the Regulations and the Directive.

INIS was satisfied, based on the information available, that the EU citizen had departed the State in 2013 and, as such, had ceased to exercise EU Treaty rights in the State in accordance with the provisions of the Regulations and Directive at that time. As the Union citizen had not been exercising EU Treaty Rights in the State in accordance with the provisions of Regulation 6(3)(a) of the Regulations since 2013, the applicant's derived right of residence under Regulation 6(3)(b) of the Regulations ceased from that time also. Against this background, the application to retain a residence card was refused.

The person concerned requested a review of that decision on 13 November 2017, this is currently being processed. INIS will correspond with the person concerned should further documentation, information, or clarification be required. Applications are dealt with in strict chronological order, and a decision will issue to the person concerned in due course. Although it is not possible at the present time to provide a definitive date by which a decision will be reached in this case, there will be no avoidable delay in completing same.

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

Residency Permits

424. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of an application for residency in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35529/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned made an application for a right to residency accompanied by a right to work based on their parentage of an Irish citizen child on 23 May 2017.

I am further advised that INIS wrote to the person concerned on 26 March 2018 seeking further information and clarification. To date, INIS has no record of a response from the person concerned.

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

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

Child Custody and Access

425. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position on legislating for equal shared parenting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35549/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The starting point for consideration of these issues is the best interests of the child. Equal shared parenting may not be in the best interests of the child in every family situation.

There has been extensive reform of family law in recent years to place a greater emphasis on recognising the rights of the child to the society of both his or her parents. The Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 is a child-centred Act which addresses the rights of children to legal security, to the care of their parents and important adults in their lives, and to equality before the law. The reforms in family law provided for in that Act recognise the crucial role of parents and the need for a child to maintain meaningful relationships with both parents.

Married parents of a child are automatically joint guardians and have joint custody of their children. Where married parents separate or divorce, they can decide between themselves on custody arrangements for their children or apply to the courts to decide on the matter. If the father is not married to the mother of the child, he will not automatically become a guardian of the child. The issue of automatic guardianship was considered during the passage of the Children and Family Relationships Bill through the Oireachtas. However, the automatic extension of guardianship to a father who is not involved and is not participating in his child's life would have consequences for the child and the child's mother, for example, if he does not consent to the issue of a passport or to the placement of a child for adoption.

There are provisions in place to facilitate non-marital fathers who have an ongoing relationship with their children to become guardians of their children. Section 2(4A) of the Guardianship of Infants Act 1964 (as inserted by section 43(c) of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015) now provides for joint guardianship by a man who was not married to the mother of the child and was cohabiting with the mother for not less than 12 consecutive months. This 12 month period must include a period, occurring at any time after the birth of the child, of not less than 3 months during which both the mother and father have lived with the child. In addition, a father who is not married to the child's mother and does not satisfy the cohabitation requirements may become a guardian if the parents jointly make a statutory declaration appointing him as a guardian. It is also open to the father at any stage to make an application to court for guardianship of the child under section 6A of the Guardianship of Infants Act 1964.

The Deputy will be aware that Article 42A.4 of the Constitution requires that provision be made by law that in the resolution of all proceedings concerning the guardianship or custody of, or access to, any child, the best interests of the child shall be the paramount consideration. Section 3 of the Guardianship of Infants Act 1964 provides that the best interests of the child shall be the paramount consideration for the court in any proceedings where guardianship, custody or upbringing of, or access to, a child is in question. Section 31 of the 1964 Act sets out a wide range of factors that the court is required to take into account when determining the best interests of the child in such proceedings. These factors include the benefit to the child of having a

meaningful relationship with each of his or her parents. The courts shall have regard to all of these factors or circumstances that it regards as being relevant to the child concerned and his or her family and make its decision accordingly.

Section 11 of the Guardianship of Infants Act 1964 provides that either parent of a child, whether or not he or she is also a guardian of the child, may apply to court for a direction regarding the custody of a child or the right of access to the child. Section 11D of the 1964 Act obliges the court in proceedings under section 11 to consider whether the child's best interests would be served by maintaining personal relations and direct contact with each of his or her parents on a regular basis.

Section 25 of the 1964 Act also requires the court, as it thinks appropriate and practicable, to take into account the child's wishes in guardianship, custody and access matters, having regard to the age and understanding of the child.

Section 12A of the 1964 Act (inserted by section 58 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015) provides that in making any order under the Act, the court may impose such conditions as it considers to be necessary in the best interests of the child. It is a matter for the courts when making orders under the 1964 Act in relation to matters such as the guardianship, custody or upbringing of, or access to, a child to determine the best interests of the child and to consider whether or not any conditions should be attached to such orders.

The Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 made provision to assist parents who need to return to court because the other parent has breached a court order in relation to custody of, or access to, a child. Section 56 of the 2015 Act inserted a new section 18A into the Guardianship of Infants Act 1964. This provides that where a parent or guardian of a child has been granted custody of or access to the child under the 1964 Act, but he or she has been unreasonably denied such custody or access by another guardian or parent, that person may apply to court for an enforcement order.

Court orders in relation to guardianship, custody and access are of course a matter for the courts, which are, subject to the Constitution and the law, independent in the performance of their functions.

While there are no plans at present for further amendment of the Guardianship of Infants Act 1964, the operation of the law in this area is kept under ongoing review by my Department.

Immigration Status

426. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if all required documentation in respect of an application for a stamp 4 visa has now been received in the relevant section of his Department in the case of a person (details supplied); if there is further documentation outstanding in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35553/18]

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

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

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

Naturalisation Applications

427. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of an application for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); when the application will be brought to a conclusion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35565/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the processing of the application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy is ongoing and I understand that the case is due to be submitted to me for my decision shortly.

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

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

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

Residency Permits

428. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when an update of stamp 4 can be facilitated in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35571/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have been informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that correspondence issued to the legal representative of the person concerned on 27 July 2018 confirming their right of residence in the State under the European Communities (Free Movement of Persons) Regulations 2015 up to 12 June 2022. I am also informed that INIS advised that the person concerned may now attend their local registration office to have the remainder of their permission to reside in the State endorsed on their passport.

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

Visa Applications

429. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a relevant visa or travel document will issue in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35572/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned does not have valid permission to be in the State and would not, therefore, be granted a re-entry visa. A person who leaves the State without a re-entry visa must apply again for a new long stay or short stay visa from abroad. There is no guarantee that an application will be successful and, while a visa allows travel to Ireland, it does not guarantee entry to the State.

The person is not eligible for a travel document and should apply to the authorities of his or her country of origin for a passport.

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

Immigration Status

430. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35574/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned was granted permission to remain in the State on 2 July 2008. The permission was subsequently renewed and the person concerned is currently registered with the Garda National Immigration Bureau up to 7 November 2018. I am further informed that it is open to the person concerned to contact their local registration office for a further renewal period.

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

Residency Permits

431. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of an application for residency pursuant to section 3(6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) in the case of persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35575/18]

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

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

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

Residency Permits

432. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of an application pursuant to section 49 of the International Protection Act 2015 in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35576/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that as the case of the person concerned predated the coming into force of the provisions of the International Protection Act 2015, their case does not fall due for consideration under section 49 of the International Protection Act 2015. Instead, and in light of the fact that the protection claims of the person concerned were determined, and refused, under the provisions of the Refugee Act 1996 and the European Union (Subsidiary Protection) Regulations 2013, the provisions of section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) now apply to the case of the person concerned. Against this background, the person concerned was served with a notification under section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) on 20 July, 2018 and, in response, the person concerned has submitted written representations.

These representations, together with all other information and documentation on file, will be fully considered, under section 3(6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), and all other applicable legislation, before a final decision is made in the case of the person concerned. Once such a decision has been made, this decision will be notified in writing.

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

INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Immigration Status

433. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35577/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned was the holder of an immigration permission valid until 21 October 2016. Their permission to remain in the State has now expired.

I am further informed that INIS wrote to the person concerned on 25 October 2016. INIS advised that all applications for permission to remain in the State on the basis of parentage of an Irish citizen child from a Non-EEA parent must be submitted on the Irish citizen child application Form. No such application has been received to date by INIS from the person concerned.

I am also advised that it remains open to the person concerned to submit an Irish citizen child application. Any such applications must be made in writing using the application form available from the INIS website (<http://www.inis.gov.ie>).

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

Closed-Circuit Television Systems

434. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the actions being taken to resolve the dispute as to whether it is An Garda Síochána or local authorities that control the data from community CCTV schemes in view of the fact that it is preventing a number of community alert groups from drawing down grant aid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35586/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will be aware that CCTV systems installed for the purposes of crime prevention and as aids to policing in areas to which the general public routinely have access, such as town centres, fall into two distinct but complementary categories, namely Garda CCTV systems and community-based CCTV systems. Neither type of CCTV system may be established without authorisation by the Garda Commissioner under section 38 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005, among other requirements.

Community CCTV is governed by section 38 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005 and the Garda Síochána (CCTV) Order 2006 (SI No 289 of 2006). This legal framework requires that any proposed community CCTV scheme must

- be approved by the local Joint Policing Committee,
- have the prior support of the relevant local authority, which must also act as data controller, and

- have the authorisation of the Garda Commissioner.

This is the legal basis for all community CCTV schemes, regardless of whether or not grant funding is sought from my Department to assist in their establishment.

In accordance with this legal framework, I understand that the large majority of local authorities have previously undertaken to act as data controllers in the context of specific community CCTV schemes, in the course of the previous grant-aid scheme operated by Pobal on behalf of the Department. Nonetheless, my Department is engaging with the Local Government Management Agency and the County and City Management Association to clarify any queries arising.

Concerning the available grant aid, the Deputy will be aware that the Programme for a Partnership Government commits to supporting investment in CCTV systems. In pursuance of this commitment, a new grant-aid scheme was launched by my Department in 2017 to assist groups in the establishment of community-based CCTV systems in their local areas. It is intended that the scheme will run for 3 years with funding of some €1 million being made available each year.

Eligible community groups can apply for grant-aid of up to 60% of the total capital cost of a proposed CCTV system, up to a maximum total of €40,000.

The Department receives a regular flow of enquiries regarding the scheme from a broad spectrum of the public. There have to date been 27 applications to the scheme. 5 applications have been approved to date. 19 applications are being considered. The remaining 3 applications have been returned to the applicants concerned to enable them to supply the information necessary to qualify for grant aid.

I am keen to ensure that all interested groups, in both rural and urban areas, take advantage of the availability of this grant aid scheme. If the Deputy is aware of community groups wishing to avail of the scheme, I would point out that full details of the grant aid package are available to download from my Department's website - www.justice.ie - and support and guidance is available to help interested groups to apply for this funding through a dedicated email address, communitycctv@justice.ie.

Immigration Status

435. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when stamp 4 status will issue in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35587/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned is the subject of a deportation order made on 11 March 2005.

The person was deported from the State on 04 June 2006; however, according to information received from her legal representatives, she returned to this State the year after she was deported.

Representations were received on behalf of the person concerned requesting that the deportation order be revoked, pursuant to the provisions of section 3(11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended). This request will be considered as soon as possible.

The Deputy might wish to note that the decision to ensue from the consideration of this

request will be to have the existing deportation order 'affirmed' or 'revoked'. Once such a decision has been made, this decision will be notified in writing. In the meantime, the deportation order remains valid and in place.

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

Family Reunification

436. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the correct procedure to be followed in order to facilitate the mother and sister of a person (details supplied) to stay with them here on a long-term basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35589/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): It is open to any visa required national to apply for a visa for any purpose. Each application is considered on its individual merits, with the Visa Officer having regard to all of the information available. The onus rests at all times with the applicant to satisfy the Visa Officer that the visa sought should be granted.

Guidelines on how to apply for particular types of visas are available on the INIS website at www.inis.gov.ie. In addition, detailed information on the circumstances in which a person can seek to sponsor a family member to join them in the State are set out in the Policy Document on Non-EEA Family Reunification which is also available on the INIS website.

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

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

Immigration Status

437. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current and-or expected residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35591/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned was granted permission to remain in the State on 3 December 2007. The permission was subsequently renewed and the person concerned is currently registered with the Garda National Immigration Bureau up to 5 December 2018. I am further informed that it is open to the person concerned to contact their local registration office for a further renewal period.

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

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

Residency Permits

438. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the procedure to be followed by a person (details supplied) whose stamp 4 expires on 25 October 2018 and who wishes to have it extended; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35594/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned had their permission to remain in the State renewed for a further three-year period, to 25 October 2018. This decision was conveyed in writing to the person concerned by letter dated 7 October 2015.

The renewal decision letter referred to advised the person concerned of the requirement that they apply for further renewal of their permission to remain, two weeks before their existing permission expired, to their Local District Headquarters.

Responsibility for the registration process referred to is vested in the Garda National Immigration Bureau.

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

Deportation Orders Re-examination

439. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 289 of 12 July 2018, if the relevant section has processed a letter of application regarding the circumstances of the husband of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35595/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the spouse of the person referred to is the subject of a valid Deportation Order made on 20 June 2002.

Representations were received, pursuant to the provisions of section 3(11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), requesting that the Deportation Order be revoked. Following detailed consideration of the information submitted in support of the request, including all representations made around family reunification, the Deportation Order was affirmed on 9 November 2017.

Having checked records in INIS, there are no outstanding applications in respect of the person concerned.

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

Deportation Orders Re-examination

440. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a review of the case of a person (details supplied) will be undertaken; the address to which notice regarding same was sent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35599/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person referred to is the subject of a Deportation Order made on 11 March 2005 and therefore has no entitlement to residency in the State.

As previously advised, representations were received on behalf of the person concerned pursuant to Section 3(11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), to revoke the Deportation Order. Following the consideration of those representations, a decision was taken in July 2018 that the Deportation Order should be affirmed and this decision was communicated to the person concerned by registered post dated 16 July 2018.

The person concerned is required to present at the Offices of the Garda National Immigration Bureau on 4 October 2018 to make arrangements for his deportation from the State.

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

Immigration Status

441. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35600/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned is the subject of a deportation order made on 17 May 2012.

Representations were received on behalf of the person concerned requesting that the deportation order be revoked, pursuant to the provisions of section 3(11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended). This request will be considered as soon as possible.

The Deputy might wish to note that the decision to ensue from the consideration of this request will be to have the existing deportation order 'affirmed' or 'revoked'. Once such a decision has been made, this decision will be notified in writing. In the meantime, the deportation order remains valid and in place.

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

Prisoner Data

442. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 809 of 24 July 2018, the figures for the total for each prison and place of detention on the day of the Census of Restricted Regime Prisoners in January 2018 and on the day of the Census of Restricted Regime Prisoners in April 2018, in tabular form. [35630/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by my officials in the Irish Prison Service that there are no prisoners on protection who are not on a form of restricted regime with the exception of one prisoner on Portlaoise Campus.

A prisoner may, either at his/her own request or when the Governor considers it necessary, in so far as is practicable and subject to the maintenance and good order and safe and secure custody, be kept separate from other prisoners who are reasonably likely to cause significant harm to him/her. This is provided for under Rule 63 of the Prison Rules 2007.

In addition, the Governor may decide, for the maintenance of good order in the prison, to remove a prisoner from general association or structured activity to reduce the negative effect that a prisoner or prisoners may have on the general population. This is provided for under Rule 62 of the Prison Rules 2007. There may also be a smaller number of prisoners who would be restricted for medical (Rule 64) or discipline reasons (Rule 67).

The Census undertaken by the Irish Prison Service on a quarterly basis provides figures in respect of all of these categories of restricted regime prisoners.

Prison Staff

443. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 297 of 10 July 2018, if he will correct the inaccuracy contained in the reply thereto (details supplied). [35650/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): In my response of 10 July 2018 I stated, inter alia, that all Governors are assigned by the Director with responsibility for Human Resources of the Irish Prison Service in consultation with the Director General and that both operate on behalf of the Minister for Justice and Equality. This is an accurate statement. It is an incorrect interpretation of the 'Carltona' principle, as appears to be set out in the details supplied with this question, that persons are individually nominated by the Minister to the Director General of the Irish Prison Service for assignment as Governors to particular prisons.

Prisoner Data

444. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 673 of 24 July 2018, the reason the figures for prisoners sleeping on the floor

in Cloverhill Prison between April and June 2018 provided in the reply were substantially different and substantially higher than the figures originally provided in response to Parliamentary Question No. 287 of 10 July 2018. [35651/18]

445. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 673 of 24 July 2018, if seven prisoners slept on the floor of Cloverhill Prison on the night of 17 July 2018 and not zero prisoners, as stated in the response to the question. [35652/18]

446. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to the fact that the the figures for prisoners sleeping on the floor in Cloverhill Prison between April and June 2018 provided in reply to Parliamentary Question No. 673 of 24 July 2018 were substantially different and substantially higher than the figures originally provided in response to Parliamentary Question No. 287 of 10 July 2018, his views on that fact; and if he will investigate whether the first response was sent in error or with the intention to mislead. [35653/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 444 to 446, inclusive, together.

In relation to Parliamentary Question No. 444, reference No. 35651/18, the matter has been looked into and I am advised that the word ‘average’ was omitted from the response to Parliamentary Question No. 287 of 10 July 2018; therefore, the figures were presented as actual as opposed to average. I sincerely regret any confusion this may have caused and the Dáil record will be amended accordingly.

The table provided in response to Parliamentary Question No. 673 of 24 July 2018 provided the nightly figures for prisoners on the floor for each of the nights in the months of April, May and June. These figures diverge from the response to Parliamentary Question No. 287 as these figures were actual as opposed to average.

In relation to Parliamentary Question No. 445, reference No. 35652/18, I can also advise the Deputy that in my response to Parliamentary Question No. 673 of 24th July 2018 it was stated that on the 17th July there were 396 prisoners in custody in Cloverhill Prison with a bed capacity of 431, equating to an occupancy rate of 92%. However, it was incorrectly assumed and stated that there were no prisoners sleeping on mattresses on the floor. I am advised by the Irish Prison Service that Cloverhill Prison Management have confirmed there were 2 prisoners sleeping on mattresses on the floor on that date.

Peace Commissioners Appointments

447. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of applications by persons (details supplied) to be appointed as Peace Commissioners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35654/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Peace Commissioners are appointed under section 88 of the Courts of Justice Act, 1924. The Office of Peace Commissioner is an honorary appointment and Peace Commissioners receive no remuneration or compensation by way of fees or expenses for their services.

An application for appointment may be submitted by a person who is interested in obtaining an appointment or a third party may submit a nomination in respect of a person considered suitable for appointment. Nominations are generally received from public representatives. A local Garda Superintendent sometimes requests an appointment in a particular area in the public

interest.

There is no qualifying examination involved but appointees are required to be of good character and they are usually well established in the local community. Persons convicted of serious offences are considered unsuitable for appointment. To this end, a background check on nominees is carried out by An Garda Síochána.

Persons who are members of professions or employed in occupations which engage in legal work or related activities and members of the clergy are, as a matter of practice, not appointed because of their occupation. Civil servants are usually only appointed where the performance of their official duties requires an appointment (i.e. ex-officio).

Officials in my Department have informed me that no application for appointment to the Office of Peace Commissioner has been received on behalf of the first person referred to by the Deputy.

Applications have been received on behalf of the other two persons in question.

I understand that officials in the Peace Commissioner Unit have made enquires with the office of the person who nominated the third person referred to by the Deputy, seeking basic contact details to enable them to process the application. To date, no response has been received. Processing of this application will continue when this information has been received. The other application is close to finality and a decision will issue shortly.

Refugee Resettlement Programme

448. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a refugee programme for those fleeing the conflict in the Republic of Cameroon will be implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35663/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will be aware of international laws in relation to those in need of International Protection and Ireland complies fully with these laws as well as ensuring compliance with EU law in related areas such as Subsidiary Protection and the application of the Dublin Convention.

As part of the Irish Refugee Protection Programme Humanitarian Admissions Programme 2 (IHAP), officials in my Department are closely monitoring the UNHCR Annual Global Trends Report which lists the top ten major source countries of refugees. In the first call for proposals under the programme, the following countries were identified as having the largest forcibly displaced populations globally: Syrian Arab Republic, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Somalia, Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Myanmar, Eritrea and Burundi.

Government policy relating to immigration and protection matters in the State is kept under constant review and the relevant authorities in Ireland are closely following and observing trends and developments in other EU Member States as well as internationally. At present, there are no plans to introduce an additional refugee programme for those fleeing conflict in the Republic of Cameroon.

Visa Applications

449. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of joint family visa applications in the embassy in India; if additional resources will be assigned to as-

sist in same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35665/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the processing times for Join Family applications received in the New Delhi Visa Office is currently around 12 months.

The Policy Document on Non-EEA Family Reunification contains a stated business target that visa applications to join family members should be dealt with between 6 to 12 months of the application being made. This, however, is a business target and does not constitute a legal obligation. The business target reflects the detailed and often complex assessment that is required to be carried out in relation to applications for family reunification. Processing times for long stay visas invariably take longer and are generally determined by the volume of applications received, the particular merits of individual applications, their complexity, whether the need to investigate or enquire further, and the resources available.

The Deputy can be assured that every effort is made to keep processing times to a minimum, and a number of measures have been put in place generally to deal with the current caseload. This includes the assignment of additional staff to help process applications, and more generally the streamlining of visa processing where possible. The position in this regard continues to be kept under review.

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

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

Refugee Resettlement Programme

450. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the emergency reception and orientation centre based in Monasterevin, County Kildare is no longer being used as an EROC centre; the reason it is no longer being used; and the locations to which persons living in the centre have moved. [35672/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): As the Deputy is aware, the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP) was approved by Government Decision on 10 September 2015 in response to the migration crisis which has developed in Southern Europe, and as an act of solidarity with other Member States.

Under the Programme, a network of Emergency Reception and Orientation Centres (EROCs) was established to provide initial accommodation to meet the needs of asylum seekers relocated from Greece as well as the needs of programme refugees from Lebanon. The role of an EROC is largely about reception and orientation for those who are to be subsequently resettled and the accommodation of persons in EROCs for a period of time is considered to be good practice by the UNHCR as it allows for a period of acclimatisation, de-stressing and on-site processing.

In the case of Monasterevin, County Kildare, the premises in question was contracted as an EROC until August 2018. The premises had also been offered to the Department as part of an 'Expressions of Interest for the Provision of Accommodation Services to Persons in the Pro-

tection Process' which was advertised in the National Press in January of this year. Given the continued high demand for accommodation services for persons seeking international protection, the Department has contracted the Hazel Hotel to provide accommodation and ancillary services to those persons for a 1 year period.

All persons in the IRPP cohort who had been living in the Centre at the time of closure have been relocated to another EROC.

Refugee Resettlement Programme

451. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of emergency reception and orientation centres here. [35673/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): Before arrival in Ireland, programme refugees and asylum seekers are interviewed abroad by Department officials to assess their needs and vulnerabilities and to initially orient them to Irish life and society. Following their arrival in Ireland, and during their initial period of reception, they are accommodated in an Emergency Reception and Orientation Centre (EROC). As the name suggests, an EROC is largely about reception and orientation for those who are to be subsequently settled around the country. In the EROCs both cohorts receive broadly the same integration services with due account being taken of the fact that certain things may not be able to happen until individuals receive a decision on their application for a grant of international protection. IRPP staff hold regular clinics in the EROCs, often at weekly intervals, at which individuals and families may discuss their needs and requirements. The client group also receive an orientation and language training programme while in the EROC.

Following the conclusion of a recent public procurement competition, Mosney, Co. Meath and Clonea Strand, Co. Waterford will be awarded contracts for the provision of EROC services. These contracts will be for an initial 2 year period.

In addition, the Abbeyfield Hotel in Ballaghaderreen, Co. Roscommon is contracted to the Department to provide an EROC until December 2019.

Prison Service

452. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 229 of 12 July 2018, if his Department gave sanction for such a process of destruction of records in the prison at that time (details supplied). [35689/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I wish to advise the Deputy that as previously stated in replies to Question No. 219 of 3 July 2018 and Question No. 229 of 12 July 2018, there is no record of files being destroyed in Portlaoise Prison in the manner referred to. As further stated in reply to Question No. 229 I would again ask that if the Deputy has any information to confirm that files were destroyed he should contact the Director General of the Irish Prison Service and consideration will be given to same.

Closed-Circuit Television Systems Provision

453. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a scheme for the delivery of CCTV cameras at junctions of motorways will be established. [35703/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): This Government is committed to providing An Garda Síochána with the resources required to carry out the organisation's duties and this is evidenced by the increased allocation of resources to An Garda Síochána in recent times. Some €1.65 billion has been allocated to the Garda Vote for 2018. As the Deputy will be aware, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution and allocation of Garda resources.

The Deputy will be aware that there is a commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government to support investment in CCTV systems at key locations along the road network and in urban centres. This commitment is being progressed in a number of ways, including in particular through the community CCTV grant-aid scheme administered by my Department.

The intention is to support local communities who wish to install CCTV systems in their localities, including access roads to their areas where necessary and appropriate. Under the scheme, which is being administered by my Department, eligible community groups can apply for grant-aid of up to 60% of the total capital cost of a proposed CCTV system, up to a maximum grant of €40,000. Full details of the grant aid package are available to download from my Department's website - www.justice.ie.

That scheme supplements the existing network of CCTV Systems in operation in the State including both existing Garda and Community based CCTV schemes. For example, there are some 35 Garda CCTV schemes in operation throughout the State comprising some 523 cameras. There are also some 45 Community-based CCTV schemes in operation encompassing some 367 cameras to which An Garda Síochána have access, established under the previous grant-aid scheme funded by my Department between 2005 and 2013.

I would point out that Joint Policing Committees play an important role in the establishment of Community CCTV schemes - indeed their approval is one of the statutory requirements for establishment of any community CCTV scheme. In this regard the Deputy may find it useful to engage with her local Joint Policing Committee.

In addition to the Community CCTV scheme and as the Deputy will be aware, under the Garda Safety Camera Contract, GoSafe will provide an annual minimum of 90,000 hours of monitoring and surveying vehicle speed across 1,031 designated safety camera zones.

Further, Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) technology is fitted in a number of official Garda vehicles which are allocated around the country and used on a daily basis to assist in the prevention and detection of crime, particularly on our roads network.

The Garda Síochána Modernisation and Renewal Programme 2016 – 2021 (“MRP”) has identified a number of areas for expansion of ANPR including:

- increasing the number of ANPR units deployed;
- the addition of more ‘watch-lists’ in order to remove a greater number of dangerous drivers and defective vehicles from the roads;
- examining the introduction of fixed ANPR sites at strategic locations across the roads network, in addition to using portable ANPR units while patrolling;
- working with the National Roads Authority, Port Authorities, Local Authorities and private car park operators in order to access data from their ANPR systems, as well as CCTV systems operating on the motorway network.

The MRP also sets out key strategic objectives for road policing which will inform and

guide An Garda Síochána's road policing plans over the next 5 years. Under the Programme, the Commissioner will undertake a number of road safety traffic enforcement initiatives, including expanding the use of technology and increasing checkpoints.

Finally and more generally, the Deputy will be aware that the Programme for a Partnership Government recognises that Gardaí must have the modern technology and resources necessary to detect and investigate crimes, and to prevent loss and harm to citizens and their property on a 24/7 basis. Some €342 million, including €217 million under the Government's Capital Plan, is being invested in Garda ICT infrastructure between 2016 and 2021 to enable An Garda Síochána to utilise appropriate technologies in delivering professional policing and security services for the community.

Garda Stations

454. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the new Garda station in Clonmel will be operational; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35724/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will appreciate that the programme of replacement and refurbishment of Garda accommodation is progressed by the Garda authorities working in close cooperation with the Office of Public Works (OPW), which has responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation.

The Garda Building and Refurbishment Programme 2016-2021, which is an ambitious 5-year Programme based on agreed Garda priorities, continues to benefit over thirty locations around the country. The Programme includes over €60 million of Exchequer funding as well as a major Public Private Partnership (PPP) project to deliver stations at Macroom, Clonmel and Sligo. This is in addition to the provision of over €100 million for delivery of 3 new Divisional and Regional Headquarters in Wexford, Galway and Kevin Street, Dublin, each of which, I am pleased to confirm, have been completed and are now operational.

Regarding the PPP to deliver stations at Macroom, Clonmel and Sligo, I am informed by the OPW and the Garda authorities that the OPW has acquired sites for the development of the new stations in Macroom and Sligo. The site for the new Garda Station in Clonmel is already in State ownership and its transfer to the OPW from Tipperary County Council is currently being finalised.

The development of PPP projects is progressed under the auspices of the National Development Finance Agency (NDFA). My Department has been in contact with the NDFA with a view to progressing the matter further. It is not possible to provide a timeframe for the completion of these projects at this point.

Garda Expenditure

455. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the costs associated with operating the Garda safety camera contract; the receipts it has generated in each of the past six years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35725/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by An Garda Síochána that the amount paid to Road Safety Operations Ireland, trading as GoSafe, for the provision and operation of safety cameras was €14.6 million in 2017.

The duration of the current contract is 6 years with effect from the Services Commencement Date (1 May 2017), with the option to extend the contract for an additional 12 months. The estimated cost of the core safety camera service over 6 years is approximately €73 million excluding VAT (Total cost of the safety camera contract over 7 years is estimated at €100.4 million, including VAT). This represents a reduction of approximately 14% when compared with the cost which would have arisen over that time based on the charges under the previous contract.

Under the current contract, GoSafe will provide an annual minimum of 90,000 hours of monitoring and surveying vehicle speed across 1,031 designated safety camera zones. This equates to a minimum of 7,400 monitoring hours and 100 survey hours a month. This represents an annual increase of 300 hours on the previous contract. The current contract also contains provisions for up to 1,500 additional monitoring hours within any calendar month and the option to avail of fixed, temporary fixed and average speed safety camera systems.

The role of the Safety Camera Contract is critical in the context of road traffic enforcement, improving road safety by changing driver behaviour in order to reduce road traffic fatalities and serious injuries by reducing the incidence of drivers exceeding stipulated speed limits, in circumstances where speeding is known to be a significant factor behind serious collisions. As such, the deployment of safety cameras is determined by road safety considerations as opposed to revenue maximisation.

The overall impact of the safety cameras can be seen in the impact on the fatal collisions in the designated safety camera zones, referred to as speed enforcement zones. The designation of specific sections of road as speed enforcement zones is based on an analysis of collision data by An Garda Síochána. In the years 2004 to 2009 (the 6 years before the introduction of the safety camera network began), approximately 3 out of 10 (30%) fatal collisions occurred in these zones. In 2015, this figure had reduced to 16% (or 24 road deaths) in safety camera zones.

The safety camera network has made a critical contribution to road traffic enforcement and, by extension, road safety, since its inception, and will continue to provide valuable support to An Garda Síochána in the context of roads policing.

In relation to the statistics sought by the Deputy on receipts generated as a result of the safety camera contract for each of the past six years, the Deputy will recall that statistics for each year from 2010 to the end of May 2016 were provided in response to his Parliamentary Question No. 59 of 16 September 2016. To be of assistance, the statistics relating to the years referred to in the Deputy's current question are reproduced below.

2012 - €	2013 - €	2014 - €	2015 - €	2016 to end May - €
4,613,360	4,383,880	6,584,880	7,521,400	2,144,720

I have requested a report from An Garda Síochána in relation to receipts generated as a result of the safety camera contract for the years 2016 and 2017 and I will be in contact with the Deputy directly on receipt of this report.

Garda Operations

456. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the amount due to An Garda Síochána for providing policing services during the Papal visit; the organisations that will pay for the services provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35735/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for managing and controlling generally the administration and business of An Garda Síochána, including the allocation of resources necessary to ensure the safety of visiting dignitaries, having regard to the security considerations involved. As Minister, I have no direct role in these matters.

I have been informed by the Garda authorities that the costs of security and public safety connected with the Papal visit are being met from public funds.

Residency Permits

457. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of a review of an application by a person (details supplied); the reason the application was refused; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35745/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have been informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned applied on 23 May 2017 for a residence card as a family member of an EU citizen under the provisions of the European Communities (Free Movement of Persons) Regulations 2006 and 2008 and Directive 2004/38/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council. They stated at that time that they were the spouse of a citizen of Slovakia.

The person concerned was advised on 10 March 2018 that their application had been refused. This was because they had been found to have engaged in a fraudulent act within the meaning of the Regulations and Directive, which provide that Member States may refuse, terminate or withdraw any rights conferred under the Directive in the case of abuse of rights or fraud. The application was refused in accordance with the provisions of Regulation 27(1) of the Regulations and Article 35 of the Directive.

Furthermore, the person concerned was advised their marriage to the EU citizen was considered to be one of convenience that was contracted for the sole purpose of obtaining a derived right of free movement and residence under EU law as a spouse who would not otherwise have such a right. Therefore, their application was also refused in accordance with the provisions of Regulation 28(1) of the Regulations.

The person concerned sought a review of that decision on 21 March 2018. However, they were informed on 09 July 2018 that the decision to refuse their application had been upheld. Having considered in detail the representations and documentation that had been submitted, the Review Officer was not satisfied that the applicant had allayed concerns that they had engaged in a marriage of convenience for the purpose of obtaining a derived right of free movement and residence under EU law as a spouse who would not otherwise have such a right.

The person concerned was informed on 09 July 2018 that their EU Treaty Rights application was closed. Furthermore, as they had no immigration permission to remain in the State, they were issued with a Notification under Section 3(4) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended).

The person concerned does not have any permission to reside in the State at the present time, and their case now falls to be considered under Section 3(6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended). Should they wish to provide further documentation or information in respect of their position in the State, they should make contact with the Repatriation Division, INIS, Chapter House, 26-30 Upper Abbey Street, Dublin 1.

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

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

Firearms Seizures

458. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 520 of 12 June and 267 of 26 June 2018, if the information requested from the Garda Commissioner will be forwarded to this Deputy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35802/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy may be aware, An Garda Síochána publish statistics each year in their annual report on the number and types of firearms seized and examined by the Ballistics Section at the Garda National Technical Bureau.

I am advised by the Garda authorities that the attached table shows the number and types of firearms seized in each year in 2013 to 2017. I am informed that details of firearms seized and examined for 2018 are not available at this time, however, I am assured that verified figures will be published in the 2018 annual report.

In relation to the number of stolen firearms used in crime incidents in each of the years 2013 to date, I am advised by the Garda authorities that the particular breakdown sought by the Deputy is unavailable.

Gun Type	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Total
Pistols	52	40	32	35	56	215
Revolvers	27	14	29	24	31	125
Light Machine Gun	2	0	1	0	1	4
Small Machine Gun	3	3	7	6	9	28
Assault Rifle	1	2	10	6	3	22
Blank Fire Pistol	12	24	21	7	14	78
Imitation Pistol	16	10	15	7	7	55
Imitation Revolver	9	5	4	6	11	35
Rifle	50	41	39	23	18	171
Shotgun	125	100	92	58	42	417
Air Rifle	49	93	79	55	42	318
Air Pistol	177	216	155	137	164	849
Muskets	0	5	3	2	3	13
Stun Guns	56	63	96	69	71	355
Crossbows	7	10	7	6	19	49

Gun Type	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Total
CS Gas	19	51	42	4	0	116
Silencers	7	12	6	11	9	45
Sawn Off Shotguns	0	0	0	0	17	17
Totals	612	689	638	456	517	2912

Visa Applications

459. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of a spousal visa application by a person (details supplied). [35819/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the visa application referred to was refused by the Visa Office in Dublin on 14 August 2018 and the applicant was advised of the reasons for the refusal.

The applicant was also advised that the decision could be appealed within two months of the date on the refusal letter. No appeal has yet been received in the Dublin Visa Office.

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

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

Legislative Measures

460. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if Part IV section 27 of the Succession Act 1965 will be reviewed to determine whether it requires amendment; if he is satisfied with the operation of this Part of the Act; his views on whether the administration of estates should be carried out by an independent agency to give greater transparency and accountability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35824/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The position is that section 27 of the Succession Act 1965 deals with arrangements for the granting of letters of administration to an estate. I am not aware, nor have I been made aware, of any difficulties regarding the transparency and accountability of administrators under existing arrangements. Administrators of estates have the same role and responsibilities of executors of estates. In addition, an administrator must enter into an administration bond (under section 34(1) of the Act) as security for their work in the administration.

In light of the foregoing, I have no plans to devolve the administration of estates to an independent agency, the establishment and operation of which would be likely to incur significant expenditure by the State.

Garda Data

461. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of tattoo and body piercing businesses that have been reported to An Garda Síochána in each of the years 2008 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in relation to injuries sustained by persons availing of services in these businesses. [35841/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have requested a report from the Garda authorities in relation to this matter and I will contact the Deputy again when the report is to hand.

Crime Levels

462. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to increased concern in relation to bicycle thefts in Dublin; the action he will take to deal with this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35854/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will appreciate that it is the Garda Commissioner and his management team who are responsible for putting in place targeted Garda operations to tackle bike thefts in Dublin and I have no direct role in this regard.

I can, however, inform the Deputy that ‘Operation Chain’ has been put in place in the Pearse Street Garda District, and is a targeted intelligence-led operation focusing on pedal cycle theft. This initiative includes Inter-Agency co-operation with Dublin City Council and interested third parties, such as the Dublin Cycling Campaign. A Garda Inspector is appointed to liaise with the Dublin City Council Cycling and Walking Sub-Committee on this matter.

I am further advised that An Garda Síochána has a number of ‘bait’ bikes which are deployed at hot-spot locations throughout the South Inner City by the Community Policing Unit. When deployed, these bicycles, the property of An Garda Síochána through Police Property Applications, are kept under surveillance by members of An Garda Síochána. The bicycles are locked in prominent positions and when an attempt is made to steal the bicycle the members intercept the offender, arrest and detain them and recover the bicycle. Follow up enquiries are conducted, which may include liaison with online retailers to ascertain if the individual has been involved in sale of bicycles on line, and follow up searches are conducted where warranted.

In addition to these targeted policing operations, on Thursday 6 September, An Garda Síochána launched the “Lock it or Lose It” campaign in response to a rise in bicycle thefts nationwide. Launching this campaign, Gardaí also provided comprehensive crime prevention advice in the hopes of substantially reducing the number of bike thefts nationwide, including advice to spend between 10% and 20% of the price of your bike on a good lock, noting the serial number on your bicycle, keeping your lock off the ground and locking your bike indoors or in a well-lit area. The full press release and further information about this campaign can be found on the Garda website at www.garda.ie.

Finally, I can assure the Deputy that An Garda Síochána continues to monitor all new and emerging crime trends in relation to this particular form of criminality and to deploy Garda resources, including personnel, to tackle the issue.

Asylum Applications

463. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will

review the decision in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35857/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy is aware, if an application for asylum or subsidiary protection has been made in the State, for confidentiality reasons it is not the practice to comment on such applications and the applicant or his legal representative should contact either the International Protection Office (IPO) or the International Protection Appeals Tribunal (IPAT) directly, as appropriate.

The IPO may be contacted either by email to info@ipo.gov.ie, by telephone to the IPO Customer Service Centre at 01 6028008, or in writing to Customer Service Centre, International Protection Office, 79-83 Lower Mount Street, Dublin 2. The International Protection Appeals Tribunal may be contacted either by email to info@protectionappeals.ie, by telephone at 01 474 8400 (or Lo-Call 1890 201 458), or in writing to Corporate Services Division, The International Protection Appeals Tribunal, 6-7 Hanover Street East, Dublin D02 W320.

Family Reunification

464. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a family has recently been reunified to a homeless situation; his views on whether this practice is appropriate; and the steps that can be taken to ensure that this practice does not continue. [35895/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Family reunification with non-EEA/Swiss national family members is available for Irish nationals and various categories of migrants and beneficiaries of international protection, with different procedures governing each of these categories.

Sections 57 and 58 of the 2015 International Protection Act set out the provisions for family reunification for beneficiaries of international protection. Other humanitarian initiatives such as the Irish Humanitarian Protection Programme and its predecessor the Syrian Humanitarian Admission Programme also provide for family reunification.

Family reunification for EU/EEA/Swiss nationals (excluding Irish nationals) is enshrined in European Union Directive 2004/38/EC, given effect in Ireland by the European Communities (Free Movement of Persons) Regulations 2015. Details on family reunification for Irish nationals and non-EU/EEA/Swiss nationals can be found in the Policy Document on Non-EEA Family Reunification, on the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration (INIS) website.

It is not clear from the Deputy's question which of these categories of family reunification is being referred to and as the services and supports available vary between categories, it is not possible to provide a more detailed response to this question. However, it is the case that persons can fall into homelessness for a wide range of reasons regardless of their nationality.

Garda Data

465. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of full-time equivalent staff attached to the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau in each of the years 1996 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35940/18]

468. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of staff in the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau by position in each of the years 2007 to 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35951/18]

469. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of staff in the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau by job title in each of the years 2007 to 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35952/18]

470. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of forensic accountants, accountants, lawyers and gardaí in the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau in each of the years 2007 to 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35953/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 465 and 468 to 470, inclusive, together.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the distribution of personnel is a matter for the Garda Commissioner and I, as Minister have no direct role in the matter. I am assured by the Commissioner that Garda personnel assigned throughout the country, together with overall policing arrangements and operational strategies, are continually monitored and reviewed. Such monitoring ensures that optimum use is made of Garda Resources and the best possible Garda service is provided to the general public.

I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau (GNECB) was established on 1 September 2016. The Bureau has dedicated expert staff, including professional forensic accountants, to address white collar and other fraud and economic crimes.

I am further informed by the Commissioner that as of 31 July 2018, the latest date for which figures are available there were 73 Gardaí and 14 Garda civilian staff assigned to the GNECB.

The Commissioner also advises that Garda management within the Bureau are working with local Garda management, at District and Divisional levels, to ensure the necessary tools and training are provided to enable and empower District and Divisional resources to investigate cases of economic crime at that level, with advice and guidance available from within the Bureau. The Bureau is now also placing a greater emphasis on ensuring that economic crime of lesser amounts that are currently reported to the Bureau are assessed and transmitted to District Officers for investigation, with more complex cases, routinely involving significant amounts, being investigated by the Bureau.

For the Deputy's information I have set out below in the following table, the number of Gardaí by rank and civilians by grade attached to the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau as of 31 December 2016, 2017 and on 31 July 2018 the latest date for which figures are currently available, as supplied by the Commissioner.

Strength Of The Garda National Economic Crime Bureau by rank 2016-2018

Year	CS	SU	IN	SG	GD	TOTAL
2016	1	2	3	11	36	53
2017	1	2	3	17	43	66
2018*	1	2	0	16	54	73

*Up to 31 July 2018

Civilian Strength by grade in the Economic Crime Bureau 2016-2018

YEAR	Accountant Grade 2	Executive Officer	DFO 1	Staff Officer	Clerical Officer	Total
2016	2	1	1	1	11	16
2017	2	1	1	1	11	16
2018*	3	2			9	14

*Up to 31 July 2018

1 District Finance Officer

Garda Expenditure

466. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the cost of the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau in each of the years 2007 to 2017 by categories (details supplied) in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35941/18]

467. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the cost of the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau in each of the years 2007 to 2017 by pay and non-pay in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35942/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 466 and 467 together.

The Deputy will appreciate that, as Accounting Officer, the Garda Commissioner is primarily responsible for the effective and efficient use of the resources available to An Garda Síochána. As Minister, I have no direct role in the matter.

I have asked the Garda Commissioner for the specific information requested and when I receive it, I will write directly to the Deputy.

Questions Nos. 468 to 470, inclusive, answered with Question No. 465.

Garda Recruitment

471. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding changing the Irish language requirement for entry to An Garda Síochána; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35968/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware competitions for recruitment to An Garda Síochána are governed by An Garda Síochána (Admissions and Appointments) Regulations 2013.

Under the 2013 Regulations, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for recruitment to An Garda Síochána. These Regulations provide that all applicants must have a proven proficiency in two languages, one of which must be Irish or English. This requirement applies without discrimination to all candidates. Such competency may be proven by achieving the relevant grades in an Irish Leaving Certificate or for English or Irish through such assessments as set out by the Public Appointments Service. While two languages are required, applicants who do not possess proficiency in Irish but have a second language will be deemed eligible under the Regulations. However, all Garda trainees are required to partake in and pass Irish while in

the Garda College.

The Public Appointments Service (PAS), on behalf of the Garda Commissioner, manages the initial recruitment stages for selection of Garda Trainees and I, as Minister, have no direct involvement in the matter. I have, however, been informed that PAS, which conducts tests as part of the competitive selection process, carefully considers all requests for reasonable accommodations. In considering such requests, PAS is conscious of the rights of people with disabilities and of the obligations on it to observe those rights and to act in accordance with the provisions of the relevant equality legislation.

I am further advised that in considering requests for reasonable accommodations, PAS has a fundamental duty to ensure it is being fair to all candidates who have entered a particular competition and that the key principle of appointment on merit is being observed. To assist PAS in considering a request for accommodations in a fair and balanced way, its policy is to ask candidates to indicate on their application if they require special accommodations and to submit evidence in support of their request. PAS will consider letters or reports from relevant professionals which clearly indicate the nature of the disability and the type of accommodation(s) that may be relevant to the person. PAS has given additional time to people with dyslexia where they have supporting evidence. However, having made reasonable accommodations, candidates must reach the required standard in order to be considered for further progression in a competition.

I am acutely aware of the need to recruit candidates with the appropriate qualifications to An Garda Síochána, and am committed to ensuring that best practice is followed with regard to any such recruitment. The Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland, which began its work in May 2017, is undertaking a comprehensive examination of all aspects of policing including, the appropriate composition, recruitment and training of personnel to ensure the personnel reflect the diversity of Irish society. The Commission is due to report later this month. The report will be considered by Government in due course and decisions taken in relation to its implementation.

Garda Station Opening Hours

472. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the situation in relation to Garda stations that are manned on reduced hours per day or per week; if there is a structure in place in relation to same (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35977/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is primarily responsible for the effective and efficient use of the resources available to An Garda Síochána. As Minister, I have no direct role in the matter.

I have asked the Garda Commissioner for the specific information requested and when I receive it, I will write directly to the Deputy.

Visa Applications

473. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the average time for decisions in respect of applications for visas lodged with the visa office in Delhi; the reason for the delay in processing these applications; the reason adequate staff resources have not been made available to deal with increased demand for these visas; and if he will make a statement

on the matter. [36003/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the New Delhi Visa Office is currently experiencing high volumes of visa applications due to seasonal demands at this time of year. This is in line with similar trends from previous years and, more generally, points to an increase in visa applications from people wishing to come to Ireland for a whole variety of reasons.

That said, I am informed that business and conference visas are currently being processed within three to ten days. Study visas at this time are being processed within eight weeks. Employment visas are currently within the time-frame of four to six weeks. Visit visas are within a time frame of seven to ten weeks. Processing times for long stay visas invariably take longer and are generally determined by the volume of applications received, the particular merits of individual applications, their complexity, whether the need to investigate or inquire further, and the resources available.

The Deputy can be assured that every effort is made to keep processing times to a minimum, and a number of measures have been put in place to deal with the expected demand this summer. This includes the assignment of additional staff to help process these applications, and more generally the streamlining of visa processing where possible. The position in this regard continues to be kept under review.

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

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

Family Reunification Applications

474. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of an application by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36010/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will appreciate that, as the representation has come through her office from a third party and not directly from the applicant themselves, in accordance with relevant data protection provisions, the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service is precluded from disclosing information relating to any individual case to a third party. Therefore it would be inappropriate for us to comment further on the case at this time.

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

Naturalisation Applications

475. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons living in Northern Ireland who have been successful in obtaining Irish naturalisation in each of the past five years in tabular form. [36012/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that statistics are not compiled in such a manner as to identify applicants for a certificate of naturalisation by place of residence. However, officials are currently working on compiling the information requested and I will be in touch with the Deputy as soon as this task has been completed.

Naturalisation Applications

476. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the additional supplementary evidence or material required from those living in Northern Ireland that wish to apply for naturalisation. [36013/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is governed by the provisions of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended. All applications for a certificate of naturalisation are processed and assessed individually in accordance with the provisions of the Act.

There is specific provision made in the Act in relation to persons resident in the Island of Ireland. Section 15A provides that, where the application is based on being the spouse or civil partner of an Irish citizen the requirements are, *inter alia*, that the couple are married or civil partners to each other for a period of at least 3 years and are living together and, immediately before the date of application, have a period of one year's continuous residence in the island of Ireland and, during the preceding four years, have a further period amounting to 2 years (i.e. 3 years in total).

It is also open to an applicant generally to apply under Section 16(a) of the 1956 Act where the applicant is of Irish descent or associations. In such cases the Minister may in his absolute discretion waive (any) of the conditions for naturalisation set out under Section 15 of the Act, including residency. The onus is on the applicant to provide evidence of Irish descent or Irish association to the Minister for consideration.

Various documentation is required for applications for citizenship including evidence of age, proof of identity (passport, etc.) as well as proof of residency, such as payslips, bank statements, etc. In relation to proof of lawful residency, for applicants residing in Northern Ireland, such information is required to be obtained from the UK immigration authorities. Similarly, a PSNI report is required for applicants applying from Northern Ireland.

In addition Section 17(b)(ii) of the 1956 Act states that an application for a certificate of naturalisation shall be accompanied by such evidence (including statutory declarations) to vouch the application as the Minister may require.

Detailed information on Irish citizenship and naturalisation, along with the relevant application forms and guidance notes, is available on the INIS website at www.inis.gov.ie.

Naturalisation Certificates

477. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons that have been granted naturalisation in each of the past five years. [36014/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the number of persons that have been granted certificates of naturalisation in each of the past five years is as follows:

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Applications Granted (to nearest '00)	24,300	21,100	13,600	10,100	8,200

The figures for 2013 and 2014 reflect the processing of significant number of applications that had built up prior to 2013.

General Data Protection Regulation

478. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he is considering legislative measures to amend section 30 of the Data Protection Act 2018 in order to retain the spirit of the section and to address the concerns of the European Commission and the Attorney General; if so, the details of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36098/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware from the detailed response which I gave to the Deputy's Parliamentary Questions Nos. 623 and 628 on 24 July last concerning commencement of section 30 of the Data Protection Act 2018, Article 58 of the GDPR already confers a far-reaching power on supervisory authorities such as the Data Protection Commission to order controllers and processors to bring processing operations into compliance with the GDPR's provisions, including the standards and safeguards applicable to the processing of children's personal data.

Moreover, Article 58 also confers powers on the Data Protection Commission to impose a temporary or definitive limitation, including a ban, on such processing and to impose an administrative fine pursuant to Article 83 in the case of infringements. This means that the possibility of imposing significant administrative fines on controllers and processors in cases of unlawful processing of children's personal data, as foreseen in section 30, already exists without the commencement of, or any amendments to, that section.

As regards possible future changes to existing law, the position is that I have asked my Department to keep application of those provisions of the GDPR and the 2018 Act that relate specifically to the protection of children's personal data under review. Since both the GDPR and the 2018 Act entered into force on 25 May last, it is not possible to say at this early stage whether any changes to the law will be required.

Garda Investigations

479. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 167 of 28 June 2018, if the assault of a person (details supplied) has been further investigated; if charges are pending in this case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36126/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will appreciate that it is the Garda Commissioner and his management team who are responsible for the

investigation of criminal matters and I, as Minister, have no role in this regard.

However, I am advised by the Garda authorities that the incident referred to remains under investigation by An Garda Síochána. The Deputy will appreciate that as this is the subject of an ongoing Garda investigation, I do not propose to comment any further on the matter.

Work Permits Applications

480. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date with respect to a work permit in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36131/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy is aware, if an application for International Protection and a related application for permission to access the labour market has been made in the State, for confidentiality reasons, it is not the practice to comment on such applications and the applicant or his legal representative should contact either the Labour Market Access Unit of INIS or the International Protection Appeals Tribunal (IPAT) directly.

The Labour Market Access Unit may be contacted either by email to *lmauqueries@justice.ie* or in writing to INIS Labour Market Access Unit at PO Box 12931, Freepost FDN5264, Dublin 2. The IPAT may be contacted either by email to *info@protectionappeals.ie*, by telephone at 01 474 8400 (or Lo-Call 1890 201 458), or in writing to Corporate Services Division, The International Protection Appeals Tribunal, 6-7 Hanover Street East, Dublin D02 W320.

I am advised by the Labour Market Access Unit that, generally, applications for permission to access the labour market are replied to within one working day of receipt. The correspondence issued clearly sets out the reasons why an application may have been refused.

Garda Vetting Applications

481. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if Garda vetting applications by persons (details supplied) will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36156/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, the processing of vetting applications by the Garda National Vetting Bureau is an operational matter for the Garda Authorities and is carried out in accordance with the provisions of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012-2016 and other relevant law. My Department has no role in the processing of individual vetting applications.

I am informed by the Garda Authorities that a vetting application was received for the first person referred to by the Deputy on 21 August 2018. This application was processed and returned to the Registered Organisation on 22 August 2018. I am further informed that a Garda vetting application was received for the second person referred to on 7 February 2018. This application was processed and returned to the Liaison Person in the Registered Organisation on 12 February 2018.

In the circumstances, I would advise the persons concerned to contact the relevant Registered Organisation to ascertain the current status of their applications.

Garda Vetting of Personnel

482. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason for the delay for a person (details supplied) who is awaiting police vetting from England; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36177/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the Garda Authorities that the vetting application in the case to which the Deputy refers in her question relates to a person who is currently in an ongoing process for recruitment to An Garda Síochána. In such cases An Garda Síochána as the recruiting authority can liaise directly with applicants in respect of their progress of the recruitment process.

The Deputy will be aware that in respect of recruitment to An Garda Síochána, given the nature of the employment, checks secondary to vetting are also required to be carried out and these can take some time to be completed. However, I am assured by the Garda Authorities that every effort is made to ensure there is no undue delay in this process being carried out.

Anti-Social Behaviour

483. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the measures in place to deal with and to curb anti-social behaviour on the rail networks, including Iarnród Éireann and the Luas; his plans to introduce additional measures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36218/18]

484. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the breakdown of figures of crimes and reported anti-social behaviour on each rail line in each of the years 2015 to 2017 and to date in 2018. [36219/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 483 and 484 together.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the allocation of all Garda resources, including personnel, is solely a matter for the Garda Commissioner and his management team and I have no direct role in this regard. However, I can assure the Deputy that An Garda Síochána continue to monitor all new and emerging crime trends in our communities.

I am advised by An Garda Síochána that Garda management engages extensively with transport operators and a range of regional and local operations have been put in place to address incidents of anti-social behaviour. An Garda Síochána maintains close contact with local and senior management in Irish Rail and other transport providers. Gardaí also have a good working relationship with the public transport services providers and patrols of uniformed and plain-clothes Gardaí, including personnel on foot patrols and other community engagement duties, are routinely employed when deemed appropriate by Garda management.

Working with communities to tackle public disorder and reduce anti-social behaviour remains a key priority for An Garda Síochána. This approach includes a strong focus on quality of life issues and collaboration with local authorities to help address the causes of anti-social behaviour. There is a range of strong legislative provisions available to An Garda Síochána to combat anti-social behaviour, including provisions under the Criminal Justice (Public Order) Acts, the Criminal Damage Act and the Intoxicating Liquor Acts. There are also the incremental provisions contained in the Criminal Justice Act 2006 which provide, in Part 11, for warnings and civil proceedings in relation to anti-social behaviour by adults and, in Part 13, which

provides for warnings, good behaviour contracts and civil proceedings in relation to anti-social behaviour by children.

While An Garda Síochána will continue to tackle this problem head-on, they cannot eradicate the problem of anti-social behaviour alone. Specifically in relation to young offenders, it is also up to us as adults, particularly the parents and guardians, to ensure that children are raised to be respectful and law-abiding. These lessons begin in the home, are further reinforced in our schools and then by society in general. We must all work together to ensure that such behaviour is never normalised and is tackled immediately.

With regard to the number of anti-social behaviour incidents on the rail networks for the period 2015-2017, I have requested a report from the Garda authorities on this matter and I will contact the Deputies directly when the report is to hand.

Prison Medical Service

485. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the number of permanent doctors allocated to the Midlands Prison for day shifts dropped from two to one between 2012 and 2013 and has not been increased in the intervening years despite the fact that the population of the prison has grown from 616 in 2012 to 830 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36220/18]

486. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the number of permanent doctors allocated to the Midlands Prison for night shifts dropped from two to one between 2012 and 2013 and has not been increased in the intervening years despite the fact that the population of the prison has grown from 616 in 2012 to 830 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36221/18]

487. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the recommendation in a report commissioned by the Irish Prison Service (details supplied) that there should be one doctor for every 250 inmates has been implemented; and if not, the reason therefor. [36222/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 485 to 487, inclusive, together.

I have been advised by the Irish Prison Service that all persons in custody are provided with a range of healthcare services based on an equivalence of care to that which is provided under the General Medical Scheme in the community. Those services are based on the primary care model, and includes general practitioner services made available to all persons in custody.

The Irish Prison Service directly employs one permanent doctor in Midlands Prison and provides two locum doctors on an ongoing basis, by way of its contract agreement for the provision of locum GP services across the prison estate, with additional cover provided at weekends.

The Irish Prison Service continues to monitor the ratio of prisoners to doctor's in each prison setting. In determining appropriate medical cover account is taken of a number of factors including, inter alia, other primary and secondary care resourcing, the age and presenting health status of the prisoner population, and the level of mental health and addiction need.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal Data

488. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there are suf-

ficient members on the criminal injuries board to enable the board to conduct its business in a reasonable timeframe in view of the fact that many cases before the board relate to injuries which occurred up to and more than ten years ago; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36226/18]

489. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of cases before the criminal injuries board; the number of cases that were received in each of the past five years; the number of cases completed in each of the past five years; the timeframe to deal with current cases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36227/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 488 and 489 together.

The Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal administers the Scheme of Compensation for Personal Injuries Criminally Inflicted (General Scheme). Under the terms of the Scheme, the Tribunal is entirely independent in the matter of individual decisions on applications for compensation.

The information requested is provided in the table.

Year	Number of Applications Received	Number of Cases in which Payments Made
2013	228	105
2014	257	75
2015	217	159
2016	210	73
2017	181	31

It is not possible to provide a timeframe to deal with the current cases as it varies depending on the circumstances of each case. While applications are processed with the minimum of formality compared to court proceedings where compensation is being claimed under the Civil Liability Acts, in making their decisions Tribunal Members must be satisfied that all supporting documentation submitted is in order. In some cases there can be delays pending the availability of all required documentation and some cases are complex in terms of medical conditions being assessed.

As the Deputy may be aware, the Tribunal is comprised of a Chairperson and six Ordinary Members who are practising barristers or solicitors. They provide their services on a part-time basis to the Tribunal. I have ensured that a full Tribunal membership has been maintained in order to continue to address claims as promptly as possible within the funds available. The term of office for all Ordinary Members has recently been extended to June 2019, pending the completion of a recruitment process for new members which will commence shortly.

Death Certificates

490. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a death certificate in the case of a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36230/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have no function in the issuance of death certificates. The Deputy may wish to contact the relevant coroner in this regard.

Garda Data

491. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of members of An Garda Síochána that are in armed units such as the emergency support unit and other such units at present; the number in such units in 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36343/18]

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

I am advised by the Commissioner that for security and operational reasons the strength of the Armed Support Units cannot be provided.

Naturalisation Certificates

492. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on whether the fees associated with naturalisation applications are prohibiting persons from applying; if the fees associated with such applications are being reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36345/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The fees to be paid by an applicant for a certificate of naturalisation are governed by the provisions of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 569 of 2011). The application fee, stipulated at €175, is payable on application for a certificate of naturalisation and a certification fee is payable on the issue of a certificate of naturalisation. The standard certification fee is set at €950, while a reduced fee of €200 applies in the case of an application made on behalf of a minor or in certain cases where the application is made by a widow, widower or surviving civil partner of an Irish citizen. In the case of recognised refugees and stateless persons the certification fee is nil. As such, the Regulations make specific provision for particular categories of applicants who may be on a reduced level of income and there is no information available to either myself or Departmental officials that in general, the level of fees is discouraging people from applying for naturalisation. In that regard, it should be noted that once a grant of naturalisation is made in respect of non-EEA nationals, they no longer are required to register their immigration permission or pay the registration fee of €300 each time.

There is no provision in the Regulations for the discretionary waiver or reduction of fees, or for differing fees to apply to different nationalities, or based on length of residency. While the operation of the Act is kept under review, there are no plans to amend the fees as they are comparable with other jurisdictions.

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

Court Accommodation Refurbishment

493. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the refurbishment works of Tralee Courthouse; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36374/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy is aware, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts, including the provision of accommodation for court sittings, is the responsibility of the Courts Service, which is independent in exercising its functions.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that, as part of its provincial capital building programme, one of the objectives is to provide improved court accommodation in Tralee which is one of a number of provincial city/county town venues nationwide still requiring new or upgraded courthouse accommodation and collectively these venues will be the next priority for investment in courthouse facilities outside the capital.

The Courts Service has advised that it envisages a courthouse comprising four courtrooms and related facilities (consultation rooms, custody facilities, facilities for juries and vulnerable witnesses, and legal practitioner's suites) as being required to meet current and future needs in Tralee and that this will require a building significantly larger than the existing courthouse on Ashe Street. In terms of providing upgraded court accommodation the refurbishment, extension and development of existing courthouses has always been the Courts Service's preference. However, while this is an option for Tralee, the scope for refurbishing and developing the existing courthouse on Ashe Street to provide the envisaged accommodation is extremely limited due to the nature of the building and the constrained nature of the site.

The Courts Service has also advised that it is currently considering a number of options for Tralee Courthouse, including the level of extension and refurbishment achievable within the confines of the existing courthouse site; whether it would be feasible to acquire an adjacent town centre site and the degree of extension and refurbishment this would allow. Previous efforts to acquire adjacent sites on Ashe Street have not been successful as the sites could not be acquired at a price that represented value for money. A further option is to build a new modern courthouse on a greenfield/brownfield site and a number of potential sites are being considered in this regard. The Courts Service has informed me that a decision has not yet been made and that all options are under review.

A number of developments in relation to Courts Service accommodation requirements are outlined in the Government's recent National Development Plan 2018 -2027. They include:

- Further new or refurbished courthouses in regional cities and county towns where facilities remain substandard (including Galway City, Wicklow Town, Portlaoise, **Tralee** and Roscommon) and further provincial locations such as An Clochan Liath (Dungloe) to serve as the Gael-tacht court for the region, and Tuam;

- Regional Family Law Centres;

- A nationwide condition survey of all court buildings in the estate will be undertaken to determine their condition and identify works required in relation to any issues identified and meet ongoing maintenance requirements.

The precise allocation and timing of additional funding over the entire ten year period remains to be fully determined. It will be dependent on the outcome of further detailed planning and analysis of costs which will determine prioritisation of projects from a timing and budgetary perspective.

Departmental Communications

494. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position in his Department and the organisations under its aegis that have arrangements in place for lo-call numbers or 1800, 1850 and 1890 phone numbers for members of the public to contact his Department or organisations under its aegis; the number of these that are completely free to call to persons that use mobile phones and may incur major bills phoning such organisations; if the situation will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36403/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): In respect of the Deputy's question, the enclosed table outlines the arrangements in place in relation to lo-call numbers for members of the public to contact my Department. These facilities were introduced for the benefit of Departmental customers in providing access to local call costs for landline calls to the Department. There are equivalent fixed landline numbers in place for each of these, which are available for callers use if more advantageous.

Arrangement		
Lo-call Arrangement	Is this number completely free to call for persons that use mobile phones?	If not please outline the nature of the charges a person may incur phoning these lo-call numbers?
The Department has a lo-call number – 1890 221 227.	No, the cost is borne by the caller.	Dependent on the caller's service provider.
Lo-call number in respect of Equality and Disability matters - 1890 555 509.	No, the cost is borne by the caller.	Dependent on the caller's service provider.
The Office of Internet Safety freephone number - 1800 242 595.	free phone number - the Department covers the cost of the call.	n/a
Lo-call number in operation in the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) -1890 551 500.	No, the cost is borne by the caller.	Dependent on the caller's service provider.
Lo-call number in INIS in respect of Citizenship and Naturalisation - 1890 252 854.	No, the cost is borne by the caller.	Dependent on the caller's service provider.
A freephone service is in operation for persons to contact the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains from Ireland and Britain - 00800 55585500.	free phone number - the Department covers the cost of the call.	n/a

Please be advised that my Department has contacted the agencies under its aegis to request that they respond directly to the Deputy.

Garda Expenditure

495. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the estimated full year cost of recruiting seven extra forensic accountants for the Garda national economic crime bureau; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36420/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, in accordance with the Garda Síochána Act 2005, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for carrying on and managing and controlling generally the administration and business of An Garda Síochána, including by arranging for the recruitment and training of the members of An Garda Síochána. Further, the allocation of Garda resources is a matter for the Commissioner, in light of the availability of resources and his identified operational demands. As Minister I have no direct role in these matters.

I have been informed by the Garda authorities that the estimated full year cost to An Garda Síochána of employing seven additional forensic accountants in the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau would be approximately €468,300.

I am further advised by the Garda authorities that this estimated costing relies on the assumption of seven forensic accountants being placed on the first point of the relevant salary scale and inclusion of employers PRSI at a rate of 10.85%.

Departmental Properties

496. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the annual rental cost of buildings rented by his Department or organisations under its aegis at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36435/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The majority of properties occupied by my Department are owned or leased on its behalf by the Office of Public Works (OPW).

The table includes details of properties leased directly by my Department or its agencies in Portlaoise.

Organisation	Address	Annual Cost of Rent
Legal Aid Board(Law Centre)	Unit 6A, Bridge Street, Portlaoise, Co. Laois.	€30,000
Legal Aid Board(Family Mediation Service)	Grattan House, Grattan House Business Centre, Portlaoise, Co. Laois.	€33,210

Immigration Controls

497. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of immigration bureau officer visits to the 12 other public licensed aerodromes not including the three State airports and 13 private licensed aerodromes by aerodrome; the number of planned and unannounced visits from 1 January 2016 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36452/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Members of An Garda Síochána who have been appointed as Immigration Officers in accordance with the provisions of the Immigration Act, 2004, fulfil immigration control duties at ports which have been approved for the landing of non-nationals. Airports which are not approved for entry into the State

for the purposes of the Act are monitored by members of An Garda Síochána in the relevant Garda Districts concerned. The Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB) provides backup and expertise to local Garda District personnel in this respect.

I have requested An Garda Síochána to compile the necessary information from the individual districts. I wish to advise the Deputy that it has not been possible in the time available to provide the details requested, An Garda Síochána will communicate the information to the Deputy once it is available.

Garda Equipment

498. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda vehicles both marked and unmarked that are under 3, 3 to 5, 5 to 8, 8 to 10 and over 10 years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36532/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): There has been very significant investment in Garda resources across the State in recent years. The Government's Capital Plan 2016 – 2021 provides €46 million for investment in the Garda fleet, to ensure that An Garda Síochána has a modern, effective and fit-for-purpose fleet. This is in addition to the investment of almost €30 million in the period 2013 to 2015. Indeed from 2013 to 2017, almost €44 million has been invested in the fleet with some 2,000 vehicles coming on stream in that period to ensure that Gardai can be mobile, visible and responsive on the roads and in the community to prevent and tackle crime.

As a result of this significant investment, in all some 60% of the fleet is now less than 4 years old, as compared to the situation in 2012 where in the region of 89% of the fleet was older than 4 years.

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

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the following table sets out the age profile of the Garda fleet as at 31 August 2018, including a breakdown of marked and unmarked vehicles. The age ranges as presented in the table are those utilised by An Garda Síochána in its records.

	<1 Year	1-2 Years	2-4 Years	4-6 Years	>6 Years	Total
Cars						1,914
Marked	15	93	362	255	39	764
Unmarked	102	174	381	199	294	1,150
Vans						494
Marked	49	43	54	104	26	276
Unmarked	41	30	93	10	44	218
Motor-cycles						129
Marked	11	13	44	25	29	122
Unmarked	1	5	1	0	0	7
4 X 4						110
Marked	18	8	26	0	21	73

	<1 Year	1-2 Years	2-4 Years	4-6 Years	>6 Years	Total
Unmarked	3	8	7	1	18	37
Others						117
Marked	8	2	11	2	9	32
Unmarked	11	29	29	2	14	85
Total	259	405	1,008	598	494	2,764

Public Order Offences

499. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons that have been charged with public order offences in the first six months of 2018; the number charged for same in 2016 and 2017 by each divisional unit in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36533/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Central Statistics Office (CSO), as the national statistical agency, is responsible for the compilation and publication of recorded crime statistics, and the CSO has established a dedicated unit for this purpose. To be of assistance, I have asked the CSO to forward the available statistics in relation to this matter directly to the Deputy.

Legal Aid Service

500. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the operation of the free legal aid scheme was last reviewed; his plans to review its operation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36534/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy is aware the Criminal Legal Aid Scheme is a vital element of the criminal justice system. The Criminal Justice (Legal Aid) Act 1962 provides that free legal aid may be granted in certain circumstances for the defence of persons of insufficient means in criminal proceedings. Under the 1962 Act, the courts, through the judiciary, are responsible for the granting of legal aid. An applicant must establish to the satisfaction of the court that their means are insufficient to enable them to pay for legal representation themselves. The court must also be satisfied that, by reason of the “gravity of the charge” or “exceptional circumstances”, it is essential in the interests of justice that the applicant should have legal aid. I have no function in these matters which are determined by the judiciary.

Following a recommendation made by my Department’s Internal Audit Committee in 2015, a Criminal Legal Aid Oversight Committee was set up. The Committee is made up of representatives of my Department, the Courts Service, An Garda Síochána, the Irish Prison Service, the Chief State Solicitor’s Office and the Legal Aid Board. The purpose of this Committee is to oversee and advise on the management and control of the criminal legal aid schemes and to provide a platform for the improved coordination of the respective roles of the agencies represented on the Committee.

My Department is preparing a draft General Scheme of a Criminal Justice (Legal Aid) Bill, the key purpose of which is to transfer the administration of the Criminal Legal Aid Scheme to the Legal Aid Board and to give effect to Government Programme commitments in respect of criminal legal aid, including introducing a more rigorous and objective means testing system for criminal legal aid, provision for contributions, and new sanctions. It is my intention to seek

approval of Government for the General Scheme of the Bill and submit it to the Oireachtas for pre-legislative scrutiny as early as is practicable.

Prison Accommodation Standards

501. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 420 of 21 April 2015 and 151 of 31 May 2016, if the findings of the pilot scheme (details supplied) will be published; when cell share risk assessments will be implemented in all prisons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36541/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by my officials in the Irish Prison Service that a committal risk assessment process has been built into the Prisoner Information Management System (PIMS). The learning derived from the pilot cell share scheme in the Midlands Prison was incorporated into the development of the new risk assessment process. This process alongside existing information contained on Prisoner Information Management allows a prison Governor to make an informed recommendation with regard to cell sharing, where a risk or need has been identified. This Prisoner Information Management development was deployed on 21 June 2018 and is now operational in all prisons.

The pillars identified for prisoner risk/needs analysis at Governor committal stage are 1. prison accommodation, 2. work/training suitability and 3. security (including escorts). Where a prisoner specific risk or need is identified in any of these three areas, recommendations for intervention are recorded and all reasonable steps are taken by the relevant provider of this service to ensure that appropriate interventions are provided leading to a safer environment for all stakeholders including prisoners, staff, visitors, and the wider community.

Garda Data

502. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of new Garda recruits assigned to each Garda division since recruitment resumed in Templemore in 2014, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36556/18]

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

The information requested by the Deputy as provided by the Garda Commissioner, is available on my Department's website through the link below.

Allocation of Probationer Gardaí by Division and Station 2014 to 30 June 2018

For more general information on Garda Facts and Figures please see http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/An_Garda_Siochana_facts_and_figures.

Garda Data

503. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of

gardaí located in counties Cavan, Monaghan and Meath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36558/18]

504. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of inspectors in the Cavan-Monaghan Garda division in each of the years 2011 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36559/18]

505. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí in the Cavan-Monaghan Garda Division in each of the years 2011 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; the locations in which they are stationed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36560/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 503 to 505, inclusive, together.

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

The information requested by the Deputy as provided by the Garda Commissioner, is available on my Department's website at http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/An_Garda_Siochana_facts_and_figures.

Immigration Status

506. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if residency can be reviewed in the case of a person (details supplied); the steps the person must take in order to be compliant with registration; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36631/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned does not have permission to be in the State.

If the person concerned wishes to make a request to the Minister for permission to remain, they may send such a request, in writing, to Unit 1 - Residence Division, Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) 13/14 Burgh Quay, Dublin 2. I am informed that the person concerned should specify how long they wish to remain in this State and provide all relevant information and supporting documentation they consider relevant to the particular family circumstances.

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

Immigration Status

507. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency

status of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36632/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person referred to does not currently have permission to reside in the State, and their most recent permission to remain in the State, on the basis of marriage to an Irish national, expired on 25 August 2016.

I am further advised that the person, having left Ireland, was refused a long-stay Join Family Visa on 16 July 2018, and an appeal was received in the Visa Office in Dublin on 18 August 2018.

Appeals are processed in the order in which they are received in order to be fair to all applicants. While every effort is made to do so as soon as possible, processing times will vary having regard to the volume of appeals received, the resources available to process them and the complexity of the application and subsequent appeal. Processing times may also vary where a detailed assessment of family rights under the Constitution and the European Convention on Human Rights is required. In the circumstances, therefore, I cannot at this time give a definitive date as to when this particular appeal will be finalised.

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

Garda Deployment

508. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to the fact there is no Garda inspector in the Ballymun area; if this appointment will be made as a matter of urgency in view of high levels of criminal activity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36778/18]

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

I am informed by the Commissioner that 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. Where a deficiency in resources is identified the matter is considered fully and addressed accordingly.

I am advised that local Garda management are making every effort to tackle criminal activity in the Ballymun area and that a number of measures have been put in place, including additional high-visibility patrols, support from the public order unit and operations by the local drug unit and these will continue into the future.

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

I am informed by the Commissioner that the strength of Ballymun Garda Station on 31 July 2018, the latest date for which information is readily available, was 121. There are also 7 Garda Reserves and 8 Garda civilian staff attached to Ballymun Garda Station. 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.

I am further informed by the Commissioner that there are currently 3 Garda Inspector's assigned to Ballymun Garda Station as of 31 July 2018, the latest date for which figures are available. I am also advised by the Commissioner that there are currently competitions in train for promotion to the rank of Sergeant and Inspector with the aim of bringing the strength to 2,000 and 300 respectively, as agreed under the Employment Control Framework. I am assured by the Commissioner that following completion of these competitions the needs of all Garda Divisions including the Dublin Metropolitan Region (DMR) North Division will be fully considered when determining the allocation of Sergeants and Inspectors.

Garda Station Refurbishment

509. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when he expects the construction of a car park at a Garda station (details supplied) to proceed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36798/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The programme of replacement and refurbishment of Garda accommodation is progressed by the Garda authorities working in close cooperation with the Office of Public Works (OPW), which has the responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation. As Minister I have no direct role in the matter.

I have asked the Garda Commissioner for the specific information requested and when it is to hand, I will write to the Deputy directly.

Garda Expenditure

510. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to the overspend of An Garda Síochána primarily due to overtime and related costs; the steps he is taking to address this issue; his plans to ensure that such steps do not impact front-line services. [36864/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will be aware that the Garda Commissioner is the Accounting Officer for the Garda Vote and as such is responsible for the effective and efficient use of the resources at his disposal. Those resources have reached unprecedented levels with a provision for 2018 of more than €1.6 billion, including an allocation of almost €100 million for overtime.

Under the governance and oversight arrangements in place between my Department and An Garda Síochána, the evolution of expenditure is kept under constant review and I have already discussed the financial position with Commissioner Harris. We are agreed that it is essential that value for money is achieved with the resources at his disposal and insofar as the emerging overrun in 2018 is concerned, he will be working with his senior management team to identify any measures that can be taken to ameliorate the situation. My Department will, of course, continue to engage with Garda management on the issue over the remainder of the year.

Work Permits Applications

511. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the status of an application for a permit by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35606/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Employment Permits Section of my Department inform me that an application for a Dependent Spouse Employment Permit in respect of the person concerned was received on 8 May 2018. Further supporting information has been requested. When this information has been received, this application will be considered.

Health and Safety Inspections Data

512. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of inspections carried out by the Health and Safety Authority in tattoo and body piercing businesses in each of the years 2008 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35840/18]

522. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her views on the fact that there is no regulation of tattoo and body piercing businesses here; her plans to introduce regulation to ensure these businesses meet minimum standards and basic training standards; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35838/18]

523. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of complaints made to the Health and Safety Authority relating to tattoo and body piercing businesses in each of the years 2008 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35839/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): I propose to take Questions Nos. 512, 522 and 523 together.

In Ireland, the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) regulates tattoo and body piercing businesses, as places of work, under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005. Tattoo and body piercing shops are also currently encompassed by the HSA's BeSmart system (<https://www.besmart.ie/eSMART>), which provides an online risk assessment and safety statement tool for businesses.

Tattoo inks are regulated under EU Regulations. Tattoo inks and permanent make-up are mixtures of several chemical substances. Since 2003 regulations on the use of tattoo inks were laid down by the Council of Europe. These regulations were revised in Resolution ResAP 2008 (<https://rm.coe.int/16805d3dc4>), which lists substances which should not be used in tattoo inks/permanent makeup. Inks used for tattooing should, at a minimum, fulfil those requirements.

The European Commission has recently tasked the European Chemical Agency with assessing the risks of substances in tattoo inks to human health and to also examine the need for an EU-wide restriction on their use. As a result, a restriction proposal was prepared to regulate specific hazardous substances present in tattoo inks so that they are safe. There is no intention to ban tattoo inks or tattooing. The restriction will significantly reduce the potential health risks for people getting new tattoos, such as allergic reactions to tattoo inks and possible long-term effects from exposure to hazardous substances injected under the skin.

Manufacturers and importers of tattoo inks must also comply with obligations under the EU

REACH and CLP Regulations, which govern chemical safety. The regulations require them to register the individual substances if they are manufactured or imported in quantities at or above one tonne per year and to classify the substances so that formulators of tattoo inks can use the information to then classify the mixture and ensure the labelling and packaging requirements are also met. Companies selling tattoo inks must provide a safety data sheet, which gives the user information on its composition and safe use. Further details on tattoo inks can be found at the ECHA webpage - <https://chemicalsinourlife.echa.europa.eu/are-tattoos-dangerous>.

The Department of Health and the Health Service Executive (HSE) are also currently finalising best practice guidelines on infection prevention and control for tattooing and body piercing. The purpose of the document is to provide guidance in relation to infection control, and is aimed at achieving the highest standards of safety and prevention. The guidelines are expected to be published later this year. The HSA actively contributed material in relation to occupational and chemical requirements before and during the public consultation.

My Department is not considering preparing any specific legislation regarding these businesses as it is not considered necessary. The principal issue is public health and therefore any new regulations for these businesses would be a matter for the Department of Health.

Complaints formally recorded by the HSA between 2008 and 2018 in the tattooing/ body piercing section are set out in the following table. My Department and the HSA would also point out that several of these topics including dirty needles and poor housekeeping are expected to be covered in the draft Department of Health guide on infection prevention and control for tattooing and body piercing practitioners and businesses.

2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1

2009: Using dirty products to tattoo and pierce members of the public.

2010: Smoking in the workplace and related fire hazards.

2016: Unsafe working at height on roof of tattoo business.

2017: Dirty tattoo needles being used.

2018: Dirty tattoo needles and poor housekeeping.

Inspections carried out by the HSA at tattoo/body piercing businesses between 2008 and 2018 are set out in the following table.

As tattoo parlours/body piercing premises do not have a unique NACE (Economic Sector) code, these types of premises cannot be individually identified on the HSA's inspection database. The HSA's database does allow for employer names and location addresses to be searched using the key words, "tattoo" and "piercing" and inspections identified using these search terms returned the following list of inspections completed:

2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
0	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	1	0	0

It should be noted that the inspection in 2016 related to construction work on a tattoo parlour and did not have any connection to the work of tattooing or body piercing.

Skills Development

513. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if her Department has conducted an analysis of the likely impact of technological automation on future employment opportunities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36438/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department provides secretariat support to the Expert Group for Future Skills Needs (EGFSN). The EGFSN is an independent, non-statutory body that identifies the skills required by enterprise across occupations and sectors. In this capacity, the EGFSN is undertaking a report on ‘Skills for the Digital Economy’ as part of its 2018 work programme.

The ‘Skills for the Digital Economy’ report aims to assess the impact of digitalisation on job roles and sectors across the economy in Ireland and to identify potential enterprise and skills policy implications arising from this. The report is taking the medium-term outlook of five years. The study is the product of large amount of desk research combined with the creation of a quantitative model of the Irish economy. The report is also informed by a small number of interviews conducted with employers, representative bodies and employees. The report is currently underway and it is expected to be published by the EGFSN in Q4 2018.

Brexit Supports

514. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the investigations and preparations her Department is undertaking to support businesses and the export sector in the event of the sterling-euro exchange rate reaching parity in the event of a hard Brexit; if her attention has been drawn to the concerns of retailers regarding the further weakening of sterling; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36961/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Informed by detailed research, my Department is putting in place a suite of measures to allow it to respond to the needs of businesses affected by Brexit.

The Brexit Loan Scheme, launched in March of this year and operated by the SBCI, offers affordable working capital to eligible SMEs that are either currently impacted by Brexit or which will be in the future. Funding granted under the scheme must be used to innovate, change or adapt to meet the challenges posed by Brexit.

To assist businesses in responding to Brexit, Enterprise Ireland has a strong programme to build resilience in Irish exporting businesses focused on innovation, market diversification and competitiveness. To this end, EI has established a Prepare for Brexit online portal and communications campaign, an online “Brexit SME Scorecard” to help Irish businesses self-asses their exposure to Brexit, as well as a “Be Prepared Grant” to support SME clients in planning to mitigate risks arising from Brexit. As part of its Brexit awareness-raising activities, EI is rolling out regional Brexit Advisory Clinics and a national Brexit Roadshow. A two-day external Brexit consultancy support is also being rolled out to individual clients to help them develop a detailed sustainable growth plan.

Local Enterprise Offices are also offering Brexit supports including a “Technical Assistance for Micro-enterprises” grant, enabling businesses to diversify into new markets, as well as tailored mentoring to address Brexit-related challenges, and targeted training on specific Brexit-related challenges.

Advisory supports in relation to business planning, such as those provided by the Local Enterprise Offices and Enterprise Ireland, will be particularly important in assisting viable-but-vulnerable SMEs that may be adversely affected due to Brexit. These supports will help raise

awareness of both private market financial supports and existing State supports.

The Retail Consultation Forum, which I chair, provides a platform for structured engagement between representatives of the sector and Government. The Forum meets four times per year, and specific issues (e.g. skills) are also pursued through working groups, bilaterals, and information events.

The Forum has proved an important means for communicating the latest updates on Brexit developments to the sector, hearing the views of retailers, and raising awareness of the supports that retailers can avail of.

Earlier this year, my Department hosted a special Brexit presentation event for Forum members to hear about and discuss two pieces of recently published research: “Ireland and the Impact of Brexit” by Copenhagen Economics, and the ESRI research commissioned by the CCPC on “Brexit and Irish Consumer”.

The Retail Consultation Forum will next meet on 20 September, and Forum members in attendance will be informed of the latest Brexit developments and discussion will focus the key issues of concern for the sector.

Regarding the potential for further shifts in the sterling exchange rate in the future, my Department continues to work with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, the Department of Finance, the SBCI, and its agencies to develop potential supports in response to the needs of businesses exposed to Brexit-related impacts. Roll out of these proposed responses is subject to resources being agreed as part of the annual budgetary process.

My Department is also currently exploring the development of a Business Finance Advisory Hub service. This Business Finance Advisory Hub will assist small and medium enterprises in making informed funding and investment decisions and will also focus on business development for a post-Brexit environment.

IDA Ireland Site Visits

515. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of IDA visits to counties Carlow, Kilkenny, Tipperary, Waterford and Wexford, respectively, from January to June 2018, inclusive; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35412/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): IDA Ireland’s South-East Region consists of Counties Carlow, Kilkenny, Waterford, Wexford and South Tipperary. Foreign direct investment (FDI) in that region is increasing, with IDA Ireland client companies having created over 1,200 new jobs last year. Total employment in overseas companies there now stands at approximately 15,000 across 75 client companies.

The following table sets out the number of IDA Ireland site visits to Counties Carlow, Kilkenny, Tipperary, Waterford and Wexford in Quarter 1 and Quarter 2 of 2018.

County	Q1 2018 Site Visits	Q2 2018 Site Visits
Carlow	1	2
Kilkenny	0	2
Tipperary	1	1
Waterford	5	9

Wexford	0	1
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Work Permits Eligibility

516. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if a person (details supplied) has permission to work via a work permit; if the person will be awarded permission in the person's own right or as a dependant on the person's parent's permission; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35527/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Dependant/Spouse Employment Permit replaces the old Dependant Employment Permit. The objective of this type of employment permit is primarily to support the attractiveness of Ireland as a location of employment for potential and current Critical Skills/Green Card Employment Permit holders and Researchers.

Eligible dependent unmarried children, who have been admitted to the State as family members of holders of these categories of Employment Permits and Researchers may apply. Generally, it is illegal for dependants to be employed in Ireland without a valid Employment Permit.

The Employment Permits Section of my Department informs me that no application has been submitted for a Dependant/Spouse Employment Permit for this individual. If, however, an application is submitted, it will be considered in due course.

Work Permits Applications

517. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the status of a work permit for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35550/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Employment Permits Section of my Department informs me that an application for a General Employment Permit for the person concerned was received on 5 April 2018.

The application was refused on 17th July for a number of reasons including that the foreign national appears to have been in employment in the State prior to this application without an employment permit, the nature of business of the employer and the absence of a signed contract of employment.

A review of this decision was requested on 24th July 2018. The review concluded on 6th September and the original decision was upheld. Additional information provided as part of the review included a signed contract of employment. However, the information received did not adequately address that the employee appears to have been in employment in the State prior to the application without an employment permit and the nature of business of the employer.

The applicant has been notified in writing of this decision and as to the reasons why.

A refusal to issue a permit in this instance does not preclude any further applications as long as all the legislative requirements for the permit are met.

Insurance Costs

518. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the measures she plans to take in response to the findings of the Personal Injuries Commission that personal injuries awards here are multiples of similar awards in the UK; the action she will take to reduce car and vehicle insurance premiums; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35628/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Apart from motor insurance, which falls under the remit of the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, policy responsibility for insurance is a matter for the Minister of Finance. I, as Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, have no direct policy responsibility for insurance. However, officials of the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, along with other Departments and Agencies, are members of the Cost of Insurance Working Group chaired by the Minister for Financial Services and Insurance, Mr. Michael D'Arcy T.D.

The establishment of the Personal Injuries Commission under the remit of my Department was a recommendation from the Cost of Insurance Working Group Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance approved by Government and published in January 2017.

The Second and Final Report of the Personal Injuries Commission was recently submitted to Minister Donohoe, Minister of State D'Arcy and me. I propose jointly with Minister Donohoe to bring the Report to Government in September and publish it following its consideration by Government. It would therefore be inappropriate for me to make any further comment on the Report at this stage.

Enterprise Support Services Provision

519. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if assistance for the development of an aerator (details supplied) will be provided; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35693/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) are the 'first-stop-shop' for anyone wishing to start or grow a business in their local area. They provide advice and guidance, financial assistance and 'soft' supports, including:

- A 'Technical Assistance for Micro-enterprises' grant designed to support qualifying businesses to diversify into new markets, enabling companies to explore and develop new market opportunities;
- Roll out of 'Lean for Micro' nationwide which will make small businesses more efficient and competitive;
- Tailored mentoring to address business challenges;
- Targeted training on specific challenges such as Brexit, including financial aspects and capability building in innovation, competitiveness and opportunity diagnosis.

Supports available through the LEOs are focused on capability building, market diversification, driving increased competitiveness, and promoting innovation so that LEO client companies can succeed.

I would suggest that the project promoter make contact with the LEO in his area. The LEO will be able to provide information on the supports that they provide, and can also advise on

other sources of support, such as programmes run by other Government agencies and sources of finance etc that may be relevant to the project. Contact details for all the LEOs can be found at localenterprise.ie.

Small and Medium Enterprises Supports

520. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to improve supports available to small and medium-sized businesses run by Irish persons based abroad who wish to move their operations back here. [35793/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): There are a broad range of Government supports available to SMEs to help them start, grow and succeed, including access to finance, management development, mentoring, business development, market supports and trade promotion.

The online tool - www.supportingsmes.ie is a cross-governmental initiative to help Irish start-ups and small businesses navigate the range of Government supports. By answering eight quick questions in the online tool, a small business can find out which of the over 170 Government business supports from over 30 different Government departments and agencies are available to them.

The Online Tool also assists business in locating their nearest Local Enterprise Office (LEO). The network of 31 LEOs provides a first stop shop for small businesses seeking supports and for people who wish to start their own business. The LEO financial supports are aimed at micro-enterprises (less than 10 employees). However, businesses with more employees can seek guidance and non-financial supports from the LEOs. For more information please visit www.localenterprise.ie.

Back for Business is a new pilot initiative to foster and support entrepreneurial activity among emigrants returning or recently returned to live in Ireland. This innovative initiative is funded through the Emigrant Support Programme by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade which seeks to facilitate in practical ways those who left Ireland and want to return home. The initiative addresses the challenges that all early stage entrepreneurs face with a particular focus on the additional barriers and challenges faced by those who have been out of the country for some time. This can often result in their local knowledge, contact base and professional and personal networks being less developed than those of typical entrepreneurs. Back for Business aims to bridge this gap. For more information on the Back for Business initiative please visit www.backforbusiness.com.

Small and Medium Enterprises Supports

521. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to address barriers (details supplied) to small and medium-sized businesses run by Irish persons based abroad who wish to move their operations back here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35794/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The barriers identified for returning Irish emigrants have been the subject matter of a report, commissioned by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and published in February 2018 – Economic Report on Addressing Challenges Faced by Returning Irish Emigrants. This report - undertaken by Indecon Economic Consultants - includes a chapter on entrepreneurial-related

barriers related to difficulties in setting up a business upon return including those barriers outlined in the Deputy's question for those transferring their operations to Ireland. These include barriers to opening bank accounts, transferring driving licenses, company incorporations and the entrepreneurial-related barriers including difficulties in setting up a business upon return, (e.g. re-establishing contact & networks, lack of local market knowledge, knowledge of legal frameworks, lack of expertise, Government & non-Government supports).

This report proposes a number of recommendations aimed at alleviating these barriers. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) is driving this initiative and progressing the recommendations of the report with the relevant Government Departments and agencies.

With regard to financial barriers and funding supports, my Department, through Enterprise Ireland, runs the Start in Ireland programme to attract overseas entrepreneurs to start their businesses in Ireland. EI's website details the supports available to overseas entrepreneurs, eligibility criteria etc. <https://www.enterprise-ireland.com/en/Start-a-Business-in-Ireland/Start-ups-from-Outside-Ireland/>. *EI have launched several calls for Competitive Start Funds, with a particular focus on overseas entrepreneurs.*

The Companies Registration Office (CRO) is the statutory authority for registering companies in Ireland. The process of incorporation and registration of a company requires delivery of a constitution, a Form A1 containing necessary details on the company and a registration fee, in accordance with the Companies Act 2014 to the Registrar of Companies. On the registration of the constitution, the Registrar will certify in writing that the company is incorporated and issue a certificate of incorporation.

The Companies Act 2014 consolidated the existing 17 Companies Acts, which date from 1963 to 2013, into one Act and introduced a number of reforms, designed to make it easier to operate a company in Ireland. The Act provides significant benefits to companies by reducing unnecessary administrative burdens and making company law obligations easier to understand.

The CRO is the central repository of public statutory information on Irish companies. To assist anyone considering incorporation of a company, it provides an Information Leaflet on the incorporation process, available free of charge at <https://www.cro.ie/Publications/Publications/Information-Leaflets>.

The Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement (ODCE) also provides a Quick Guide and an Information Booklet, available free of charge at <http://www.odce.ie/en-gb/publications/companylawguidance/informationbooks.aspx>.

Information on a range of supports available to assist companies, is available on the Business Regulation website, <http://www.businessregulation.ie/Supports-for-business/>. My Department's website also includes a dedicated page on support for SMEs, available at <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Supports-for-SMEs/>.

DFAT has implemented several of the Indecon Report's recommendations in relation to information provision. An enhanced 'Returning to Ireland' section, containing more information and advice for returning emigrants, has been developed for the dedicated diaspora website, the Global Irish Hub. DFAT is working closely with the Citizen's Information Board to ensure that returning emigrants have the best information and advice possible to assist them in making the return back to Ireland by preparing and publishing a number of advice notes for people returning to Ireland to live. These are located on its Global Irish website here. Under the section on finances there are notes on car insurance and on setting up bank accounts. These aspects are within the remit of the Minister for Finance.

Minister of State Cannon has also written to all motor insurance underwriters that operate in Ireland requesting information as to their approach, with a view to further information on motor insurance for returning emigrant drivers being made available.

Details on transferring drivers' licences are available on the NDLS website, <https://www.ndls.ie/holders-of-foreign-licences.html#to-apply-to-exchange-a-foreign-driving-licence-issued-by-a-member-state-of-the-european-union-european-economic-area>. These are within the remit of the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport.

On the issue of insurance costs, the price of motor insurance as measured by the CPI increased by approximately 40% in the period 2014-2016, but prices have moderated in recent months. The Government recognises that rising insurance costs for enterprise are an issue and the Minister for Finance established the Cost of Insurance Working Group in July 2016. The Group published its first Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance in January 2017. The establishment of the Personal Injuries Commission, strengthening the power of PIAB in terms of addressing cases of non-cooperation and examining the frequency of the publication of the Book of Quantum, were key recommendations.

In January 2018, following approval by Government, Minister D'Arcy at the Department of Finance published the Cost of Insurance Working Group Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance. This Report makes 15 recommendations with 29 associated actions to be carried out. My Department in conjunction with PIAB has lead responsibility for Recommendation 9, which relates to a review of the operation of the six-month standstill period provided for in the PIAB Act 2003, with a timeline of completion by Quarter 2 of 2019.

In December 2017, my Department published the First Report of the Personal Injuries Commission. The Report is the first phase of an eighteen-month work programme. Implementation of the actions in this Report will help to bring more consistency to medical reporting and diagnosis of personal injuries, leading to a better functioning personal injuries environment in the future. The Final Report of the Personal Injuries Commission deals mainly with the benchmarking of Irish personal injury award levels and an examination of alternative compensation and resolution models in other jurisdictions and makes a number of recommendations. The purpose of the Personal Injuries Assessment Board (Amendment) Bill 2018 is to amend the existing legislation to strengthen PIAB in terms of operational issues to ensure greater compliance with the PIAB process and encourage more claims to be settled through the PIAB model. The Bill includes the recommendations from the Cost of Insurance Working Group Motor Report.

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

Questions Nos. 522 and 523 answered with Question No. 512.

Business Regulation

524. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if her attention has been drawn to a case (details supplied); and her plans to investigate whether the company's actions are in breach of the law. [35853/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): This issue is a matter for my colleague Regina Doherty T.D. the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

Foreign Direct Investment

525. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of companies supported by the IDA by country of origin in tabular form; her views on whether there is an over-reliance on any one country; the measures she is taking to reduce this over-reliance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35898/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Ireland remains a global leader in attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) with 1,384 multinational companies from over 40 countries choosing to invest here. The following table outlines the number of IDA-supported companies by country of origin. American firms account for the largest share of multinationals with 753 companies.

The IDA has made significant progress in diversifying their portfolio of client companies that invest here. There were, for example, 111 new name investments in 2017, an increase of 12% compared to 2016 which saw 99 new name investments.

The IDA is working hard to avail of new opportunities from our non-traditional target markets. This includes seeking new investors from the Middle East, Africa and across Asia. I am particularly encouraged by the progress made in recent times in securing investment from countries like China, South Korea and India. This shows that the concerted effort that the IDA has made in growing investment from Asia is producing results in terms of new jobs here on the ground in Ireland.

While much has been accomplished in this context, the Government remains conscious of our need to continue attracting FDI from as many different countries as possible. To diversify investment here further, we need to build awareness of Ireland as a preferred investment destination in target countries, as well as improve competitiveness and consolidate Ireland's traditional strengths in terms of talent, productivity and ease of doing business. I am confident that this approach will help boost further the number of investors here from non-traditional markets and that we will continue to see greater geographic diversity across the IDA's client portfolio.

Country of Origin	No. of companies
Australia	19
Austria	1
Belgium	15
Bermuda	14
British Virgin Islands	1
Canada	34
Cayman Islands	6
China	24
Cyprus	1
Denmark	7
Finland	7
France	60
Germany	96
Great Britain	104
Greece	2
Hong Kong	1
India incl Sikkim	24

Country of Origin	No. of companies
Ireland	3
Israel	2
Italy	31
Japan	34
Liechtenstein	2
Luxembourg	9
Malaysia	1
Mexico	3
Netherlands	32
Nigeria	1
Norway	5
Portugal	3
Russia	10
Serbia	1
Singapore	5
Slovenia	1
South Africa	5
South Korea	4
Spain	7
Sri Lanka	1
Sweden	12
Switzerland	39
Taiwan	1
Turkey	1
United Arab Emirates (inc. Abu Dhabi)	1
United States of America (inc. Puerto Rico)	753
Uruguay	1
Grand Total	1,384

Health and Safety Authority Data

526. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of convictions and prosecutions obtained by the Health and Safety Authority in 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35911/18]

527. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number and amount of fines imposed by the Health and Safety Authority in 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35912/18]

528. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of inspections carried out by health and safety inspectors in 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018; the number of these that were unannounced; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35913/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): I propose to take Questions Nos. 526 to 528, inclusive, together.

PQ No	Question	2016	2017	2018 to 03 September 2018
35911/18	Number of prosecutions taken and convictions obtained by the Authority 1	17 (9 on Indictment and 8 Summarily)	21 (12 on Indictment and 9 Summarily)	11 (7 on Indictment and 4 Summarily)
35912/18	Number and amount of fines imposed by the Courts on behalf of the Authority 1	Total €614,00 (€585,000 on Indictment and €29,000 Summarily) 1 case was dismissed	Total €2,695,500 (€2,659,00 on Indictment and €36,500 Summarily) 3 cases were dismissed	Total (€571,872 on Indictment and €8,500 Summarily) 1 case was dismissed
35912/18	Number of fixed payment notices (FPNs) issued by the Authority 2	0	0	13 FPNs - total €5,700
35913/18	Number of Inspections (also includes investigations 3) carried out by the Authority 4	10,477	9,934	6,769

1 The DPP takes prosecutions on behalf of the Health and Safety Authority at two levels in the Courts, these are on indictment in the Circuit Court before a jury and summarily before a Judge in the District Court. The upper limit that the Circuit Court can impose fines on conviction up to €3 million per count or imprisonment up to 2 years, while the District Court has an upper limit of €5,000 fine per count on conviction or imprisonment up to 6 months.

In a number of cases in the Courts, the Judge may dismiss the case taken by the Authority. In 2016, 1 case was dismissed, 3 in 2017 and 1 in 2018. The judge may also dismiss the case if the defendant makes a contribution to the Court poor box. These include 1 in 2016 for €2,000 and 2 in 2017 for €5,000 and €2,000.

2 Under Regulation 28 of the European Communities (Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road and Use of Transportable Pressure Equipment) Regulations 2011 to 2018, a HSA inspector can issue a 'fixed payment notice' (FPN) for alleged offence(s) of the Regulations. The payment amount for each alleged offence referenced in a FPN relates to the category of the alleged offence and can be €100, €250 or €500 for category III, II and I alleged offences respectively.

3 Health and Safety Authority Inspectors carry out targeted inspections and investigations across all work sectors and work activities that come under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 and the Chemicals Act 2008. Most inspections are targeted at the high risk sectors such as construction, agriculture, forestry, manufacturing, health care, mines, quarries, transport of dangerous goods by road, or the chemical sectors. Other inspections can be part of a particular safety awareness campaign e.g. on manual handling, on slips, trips or falls or on compliance with the REACH Regulation.

4 Each year the HSA carries out approximately 200 investigations. These investigations include all fatal accidents and selected serious accidents which are connected to work activities.

Furthermore approximately 800 investigations of complaints made by workers and members of the public about workplace health and safety issues are carried out annually. These investigations are included in the above figures.

Over 90% of the targeted inspections and complaint investigations carried out by the HSA are unannounced. In the case of accident investigations the majority of these are announced. This is to ensure that the appropriate persons are available to the investigating inspector at the workplace for providing information, being interviewed as witnesses and for providing statements. Some follow up inspections may also be announced when these involve checking for compliance with a previously served Prohibition or Improvement Notice.

Workplace Relations Commission

529. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of inspections carried out by Workplace Relations Commission, WRC, inspectors in 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018; the number of these that were unannounced; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35914/18]

530. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of convictions and prosecutions obtained by the Workplace Relations Commission in 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35915/18]

531. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number and amount of fines imposed by the Workplace Relations Commission in 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35916/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): I propose to take Questions Nos. 529 to 531, inclusive, together.

The Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) is an independent, statutory body under the aegis of my Department. The WRC's core functions include adjudicating on complaints under employment rights, equality and industrial relations legislation, carrying out inspections of employer records in relation to employment rights compliance, and the provision of mediation, conciliation and advisory services.

Table 1 sets out the number of inspections that were undertaken by the WRC in 2016, 2017, and to date in 2018, including the number of unannounced inspections:

Table 1: Year	Total Inspections	Unannounced Inspections
2016	4,830	2,877
2017	4,747	2,741
2018 (to 31 July)	3,351	2,207

Table 2 sets out the number of convictions and prosecutions obtained by the WRC in 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018;

Table 2: Year	Prosecutions	Convictions
2016	138	85
2017	126	94
2018 (to 31 July)	40	21

The reference in the Deputy's question to "fines imposed by the WRC" is taken to mean the

number of Fixed Payment Notices issued by the WRC under Section 36 of the Workplace Relations Act 2015. Table 3 sets out the number and amount of such notices issued by the WRC in 2016, 2017, and to date in 2018.

Table 3: Year	Cases where Fixed Payment Notices were imposed by WRC	Total amount imposed by WRC
2016	19	€28,500
2017	29	€43,500
2018 (to 31 July)	15	€22,500

Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement Staff

532. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of full-time equivalent staff attached to the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement in each of the years 1996 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35943/18]

535. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of staff by position in the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement in each of the years 2007 to 2017, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35946/18]

536. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of staff by job title in the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement in each of the years 2007 to 2017, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35947/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 532, 535 and 536 together.

The Office of Director of Corporate Enforcement (ODCE) was established under the Company Law Enforcement Act 2001 to enforce and encourage compliance with company law. The ODCE continues its work under the Companies Act 2014. The following table sets out the number of staff and their grade (position/job title) attached to the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement in each of the years since it was established in 2001 to 2017 and to date in 2018.

No. of staff *l* serving in the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement (ODCE) (2001-2018)

Grade	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Director	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Corporate Compliance Manager	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1

Questions - Written Answers

Grade	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Legal Ad- viser	0	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Prin- cipal Solici- tor	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
En- force- ment Port- folio Man- ager	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Digital Fo- rensic Spe- cialist	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
En- force- ment Law- yer	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Prin- cipal Officer	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Profes- sional Ac- coun- tant Grade (1)	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Solici- tor	0	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2
As- sistant Prin- cipal Officer	4	5	5	4	4	4	4	4	4
Higher Ex- ecutive Officer	5	6	4	5	5	5	7	10	12
Ex- ecutive Officer	1	4	5	4	4	4	6	8	8

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Grade	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Clerical Officer	2	7	6	8	8	7	7	7	8
Total	17	32	31	32	33	32	35	41	44
Gardai (3)	0	7	7	6	5	8	8	7	7

table continuing

Grade	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018 (2)
Director	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Corporate Compliance Manager	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0
Legal Adviser	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	1	-
Principal Solicitor	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	-
Enforcement Portfolio Manager	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2
Digital Forensic Specialist	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
Enforcement Lawyer	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Principal Officer	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

Questions - Written Answers

Profes- sional Ac- coun- tant Grade (1)	2	2	2	1	1	0	5	5	7
Solici- tor	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1
As- sistant Prin- cipal Officer	4	4	4	4	3	3	3	3	3
Higher Ex- ecutive Officer	11	12	9	9	8	8	8	7	8
Ex- ecutive Officer	8	7	6	6	6	6	5	6	6
Cleri- cal Of- ficer	8	7	8	8	8	8	8	7	9
Total	43	42	38	37	35	33	35	35	40
Gardai (3)	10	10	10	8	7	6	5	7	6

(1) Refers to number of people not FTE's

(2) Staffing as at 5th September 2018

(3) The ODCE also has an approved complement of seven members of An Garda Siochana (one Detective Inspector, two Detective Sergeants and four Detective Gardai). There is currently a vacancy at Detective Inspector level.

Following his appointment in the latter half of 2012, the Director carried out a review of the ODCE's then skills mix and operational capacity. That review, inter alia, identified certain skill deficiencies, as a consequence of which sanction was sought, and subsequently obtained, to recruit a number of additional professional staff to address the identified need.

Further to that process, the Department, through the Public Appointments Service, recruited six suitably qualified and experienced forensic accountants (although one was later successful in another recruitment campaign) together with a suitably qualified and experienced digital forensics specialist, for assignment to the ODCE.

Over recent years, a number of senior-level vacancies have arisen within the ODCE through a combination of retirement, promotion and transfer to other parts of the public service. In that context, the skill sets, competencies, roles and responsibilities associated with each of those posts have been reviewed and reconfigured by the Director to better reflect the organisation's current needs. That exercise has resulted in two senior-level professional posts of Enforcement Portfolio Manager being created. Both of these posts having been filled through recruitment campaigns led by the Public Appointments Service. Public Appointments Service ran a re-

cruitment campaign for the positions of Enforcement Lawyer and two remaining Forensic Accountant (Professional Accountant Grade 1) positions on 26th January 2018. One Enforcement Lawyer was appointed to the ODCE on 11th June 2018 and the second will be appointed on 1st October, 2018. Two Forensic Accountants were identified from this competition and one was appointed on 8th May 2018 and the second on 23rd July 2018.

The ODCE also has an approved complement of seven members of An Garda Síochána (one Detective Inspector, two Detective Sergeants and four Detective Gardaí). At this time, there is one vacancy in that approved complement, i.e., the Detective inspector post. The filling of that post is a matter for the Commissioner.

Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement Expenditure

533. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the cost of the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement in each of the years 2007 to 2017 by categories (details supplied) in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35944/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Details of the expenditure by the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement in each of the years 2007 to 2017, by each of the categories requested, is set out in the following table.

Year	Salaries, wages and allowances	Travel and subsistence	Training and development and incidental expenses	Postal and tele-communications services	Office equipment and external IT services	Maintenance of premises[1]	Consultancy services	Other Non-Pay
2007	€2,140,206.63	€31,017.21	€33,843.21	€114,233.19	€246,053.39	€259,970.30	€268,754.28	€1,284,595.92
2008	€2,411,572.62	€31,955.00	€34,631.39	€160,287.97	€208,710.69	€350,054.36	€169,252.75	€976,723.38
2009	€2,663,550.86	€19,153.24	€16,081.64	€70,731.89	€150,045.27	€305,544.08	€134,518.87	€2,245,068.53
2010	€2,625,219.16	€17,332.33	€31,676.46	€74,487.58	€150,252.13	€278,658.92	€70,558.26	€425,848.42
2011	€2,628,944.08	€19,485.06	€11,747.39	€61,429.78	€104,781.14	€269,131.60	€69,642.16	€231,733.84
2012	€2,463,026.64	€17,298.68	€20,819.48	€71,689.99	€91,305.91	€327,664.50	€100,013.58	€344,668.02
2013	€2,394,397.84	€16,971.54	€20,536.41	€49,182.18	€61,063.81	€299,035.22	€120,552.30	€161,834.94
2014	€2,215,773.54	€24,283.34	€22,901.75	€47,705.56	€43,116.95	€308,016.82	€85,829.40	€264,871.26
2015	€2,156,075.02	€16,545.69	€17,002.16	€42,368.31	€87,879.41	€346,801.91	€245,094.39	€161,368.58
2016	€2,006,111.72	€15,835.30	€29,055.11	€38,330.77	€133,263.54	€320,507.52	€49,966.71	€134,547.38
2017	€1,976,087.64	€19,277.16	€24,207.24	€39,922.45	€64,313.99	€415,370.18	€196,197.67	€278,862.31

(1) Details in respect of Office Premises are provided for the ODCE as there is no separate cost associated with Garda premises.

Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement Expenditure

534. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the cost of the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement in each of the years 2007 to 2017, by pay and non-pay in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35945/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Details of the expenditure by the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement in each of the years 2007 to 2017, by pay and non pay in tabular form, is set out in the following table.

Year	Pay expenditure at year end	Non-Pay expenditure at year end
2007	€2.140m	€2.238m
2008	€2.412m	€1.932m
2009	€2.664m	€2.941m
2010	€2.625m	€1.049m
2011	€2.629m	€0.768m
2012	€2.463m	€0.973m
2013	€2.394m	€0.729m
2014	€2.216m	€0.797m
2015	€2.156m	€0.917m
2016	€2.006m	€0.721m
2017	€1.976m	€1.038m

Questions Nos. 535 and 536 answered with Question No. 532.

IDA Ireland Data

537. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the vacant IDA Ireland sites by county; the IDA sites being used by county in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36047/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The availability of an adequate supply of marketable serviced land and buildings in advance of demand is a key element in the IDA's ability to compete for mobile foreign direct investment. The availability of property solutions allows projects to commence at an earlier date by diminishing much of the difficulties associated with land acquisition, planning and construction. It therefore remains an important means by which the IDA can encourage and attract new investors to Ireland, particularly to the regions. The following tables outline the marketable and fully occupied IDA sites by county.

Table A: IDA marketable lands by county.

Property Name	Property Address	Property Town	Property County	Property Type	Property Status	Net Hectares Marketable
Bagenalstown		Bagenalstown	County Carlow	Industrial Estate	Marketable	0.1555
Cavan B and T Park		Cavan	County Cavan	Business Park	Marketable	10.2
Millstreet IDA Estate		Millstreet	County Cork	Industrial Estate	Disposed	0.1133
Rossa Ave	Cork City	Cork City	County Cork	Industrial Estate	Marketable	0.1152
Rathhalli-keen	Kinsale	Kinsale	County Cork	Industrial Estate	Marketable	0.1298
Ringaskiddy Estate	Cork City	Cork City	County Cork	Industrial Estate	Marketable	0.2023

Property Name	Property Address	Property Town	Property County	Property Type	Property Status	Net Hectares Marketable
Mallow B and T Park		Kanturk	County Cork	Business Park	Marketable	0.6831
Cork B and T Park	Model Farm Rd	Cork City	County Cork	Industrial Estate	Marketable	0.83
Rathealy	Fermoy	Fermoy	County Cork	Industrial Estate	Marketable	0.9407
Foxhole	Youghal	Youghal	County Cork	Industrial Estate	Marketable	1.0063
Laragh Estate	Bandon	Bandon	County Cork	Industrial Estate	Marketable	1.83
Rathgoggan Estate	Charleville	Charleville	County Cork	Industrial Estate	Marketable	1.86
Springfield Estate	Youghal	Youghal	County Cork	Industrial Estate	Marketable	1.87
Drombrow	Bantry	Bantry	County Cork	Industrial Estate	Marketable	1.9627
Pulleen	Kanturk	Kanturk	County Cork	Industrial Estate	Marketable	2.47
Poundlick Estate	Skibbereen	Skibbereen	County Cork	Industrial Estate	Marketable	3.86
Fermoy B and T Park	Dublin Road	Fermoy	County Cork	Business Park	Marketable	6.05
Carrigtohill B and T Park		Carrigtohill	County Cork	Strategic Site	Marketable	22.85
Cork Carrigtohill East	Ballyadam	Carrigtohill East	County Cork	Strategic Site	Marketable	53.1576
Cork City Kilbarry B and T Park	Dublin Hill	Cork City	County Cork	Business Park	Marketable	57.53
Ringaskiddy		Cork City	County Cork	Strategic Site	Marketable	165.86
Letterkenny Lisnenan 2		Letterkenny/Manorcun	County Donegal	Industrial Estate	Marketable	0.313
Lurganboy	Donegal	Donegal/Tully/Clar/B	County Donegal	Industrial Estate	Marketable	0.872
Ballyshannon		Ballyshannon	County Donegal	Industrial Estate	Marketable	1.0672
Knocknamona	Manorcunningham	Letterkenny	County Donegal	Industrial Estate	Marketable	1.35
Letterkenny B and T Park		Letterkenny/Manorcun	County Donegal	Business Park	Marketable	2.6282

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Property Name	Property Address	Property Town	Property County	Property Type	Property Status	Net Hectares Marketable
Letterkenny B and T Park		Letterkenny/Manorcun	County Donegal	Business Park	Marketable	19.33
Dubl 12 - Ballymount Ind. Est.	Ballymount Industrial Estate	Dublin 12	County Dublin	Industrial Estate	Marketable	0.0249
Dublin 24 - Whitestown Ind Est	Whitestown Industrial Estate	Dublin 24	County Dublin	Industrial Estate	Marketable	0.56
Swords Bus. Park, Greenfields		Swords	County Dublin	Industrial Estate	Marketable	2.82
Dubl 11 - Poppintree Ind. Est.	Poppintree	Dublin 11	County Dublin	Industrial Estate	Marketable	3.78
Blanchardstown B and T Park	Ballycoolen	Blanchardstown	County Dublin	Business Park	Marketable	10.4956
Cruiserath	Blanchardstown	Blanchardstown	County Dublin	Strategic Site	Marketable	27.1925
Belcamp - B and T Park	Belcamp	Dublin 5	County Dublin	Business Park	Marketable	46.44
Mountbellew Business Park		Mountbellew/Ballygar	County Galway	Industrial Estate	Marketable	0.1979
Glenamaddy Business Park		Glenamaddy	County Galway	Industrial Estate	Marketable	0.9105
Gort Business Park		Gort	County Galway	Industrial Estate	Marketable	1
Roundstone		Roundstone	County Galway	Industrial Estate	Marketable	1.42
Tuam Business Park		Tuam	County Galway	Industrial Estate	Marketable	2.17
Ballygar Site		Ballygar	County Galway	Industrial Estate	Marketable	3.4398
Ballinasloe B and T Park		Ballinasloe	County Galway	Business Park	Marketable	8.88
Tuam Science and Technology Park		Tuam	County Galway	Business Park	Marketable	10.1269

Property Name	Property Address	Property Town	Property County	Property Type	Property Status	Net Hectares Marketable
Oranmore Science and Tech Park	Carrowmo-neash	Galway City	County Galway	Strategic Site	Marketable	26.78
Parkmore B and T Park (W and E)		Galway City	County Galway	Business Park	Marketable	27.27
Athenry		Athenry	County Galway	Strategic Site	Marketable	92.4351
Dingle		Dingle	County Kerry	Industrial Estate	Marketable	0.5059
Farrantoreen	Killorglin	Killorglin	County Kerry	Industrial Estate	Marketable	0.8224
Acq c.1.0Ha Tralee	Tralee Business & Technology P	Tralee	County Kerry	Business Park	Marketable	1
Killarney B and T Park		Killarney	County Kerry	Industrial Estate	Marketable	1.14
Newbridge Business Park		Newbridge	County Kildare	Business Park	Marketable	2.9339
Purcellsinch Ind. Park	Bennets-bridge	Kilkenny	County Kilkenny	Industrial Estate	Marketable	5.64
Kilkenny B and T Park		Kilkenny/Bennets-brid	County Kilkenny	Business Park	Marketable	14.0783
Belview		Belview	County Kilkenny	Strategic Site	Marketable	26.73
27.9 Ha at Belview (Gorteens)	Belview	Kilkenny	County Kilkenny	Strategic Site	Marketable	27.89
Portlaoise B and T Park		Portlaoise	County Laois	Business Park	Marketable	10.9868
Carrick-On-Shannon	Tullyleague	Carrick-On-Shannon	County Leitrim	Industrial Estate	Marketable	0.1845
Drumshanbo	Keshcarr	Drumshanbo	County Leitrim	Industrial Estate	Marketable	0.2238
Carrick-leitrim	Manor-hamilton	Manor-hamilton	County Leitrim	Industrial Estate	Marketable	0.4208
Manorhamilton	Ballin	Manor-hamilton	County Leitrim	Industrial Estate	Marketable	0.9264
Mohill	Dromod	Mohill	County Leitrim	Industrial Estate	Marketable	2.0693

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Property Name	Property Address	Property Town	Property County	Property Type	Property Status	Net Hectares Marketable
Carrick-On-Shannon B and T Park		Carrick-On-Shannon	County Leitrim	Business Park	Marketable	5.0226
Raheen Business Park	Raheen	Limerick	County Limerick	Business Park	Marketable	47.95
The National Technology Park	Plassey	Limerick	County Limerick	Business Park	Marketable	71.021
Longford Industrial Estate	Lisnamuck	Longford	County Longford	Industrial Estate	Marketable	1.0176
Aghafad	Longford	Longford	County Longford	Industrial Estate	Marketable	2.0272
Greenore		Greenore	County Louth	Industrial Estate	Marketable	0.0272
Dundalk Finnabair B and T Park		Dundalk	County Louth	Business Park	Marketable	7.49
Dundalk Mullagharlin East		Dundalk/Ravensdale	County Louth	Strategic Site	Marketable	12.5
Drogheda B and T Park	Donore Rd.	Drogheda	County Louth	Business Park	Marketable	22.53
Dundalk Mullagharlin	Mullagharlin	Dundalk	County Louth	Strategic Site	Marketable	44.175
Bango Erris Industrial Park	Bangor Erris	Bangor Erris	County Mayo	Industrial Estate	Marketable	0.607
Foxford Business Park		Foxford	County Mayo	Industrial Estate	Marketable	0.6798
Castlebar B and T Park		Castlebar	County Mayo	Business Park	Marketable	3.0897
Ballina	Quignashee	Ballina	County Mayo	Industrial Estate	Marketable	10.6141
Navan B and T Park		Navan Boyerstown Bro	County Meath	Business Park	Marketable	24.2
Monaghan Business Park	Knockaconny	Monaghan	County Monaghan	Business Park	Marketable	7.53
Tullamore Industrial Estate		Tullamore	County Of-faly	Industrial Estate	Marketable	0.3541

Property Name	Property Address	Property Town	Property County	Property Type	Property Status	Net Hectares Marketable
Clara		Clara	County Offaly	Industrial Estate	Marketable	0.4872
Tullamore B and T Park	Srah	Tullamore	County Offaly	Business Park	Marketable	8
Station Rd	Castlerea	Castlerea	County Roscommon	Industrial Estate	Marketable	1.1735
Roscommon B and T Park	Racecourse Road	Roscommon	County Roscommon	Business Park	Marketable	4.8
Easkey Business Park		Easkey	County Sligo	Industrial Estate	Marketable	0.0611
Finisklin B and T Park	Castleblawin	Sligo	County Sligo	Business Park	Marketable	10.3
Sligo - Oakfield Site		Sligo	County Sligo	Industrial Estate	Marketable	31.3186
Knockanrawley	Tipperary	Tipperary	County Tipperary	Industrial Estate	Marketable	2.08
Clonmel Bus Park		Clonmel	County Tipperary	Industrial Estate	Marketable	20.071
Waterford Industrial Estate	Cork Rd	Waterford	County Waterford	Industrial Estate	Marketable	6.51
Dungarvan B and T Park		Dungarvan	County Waterford	Business Park	Marketable	11.5675
Waterford B & T Park	Butlerstown	Waterford	County Waterford	Business Park	Marketable	22.95
Garrankesh Estate	Athlone	Athlone	County Westmeath	Industrial Estate	Marketable	0.0926
Clonmore Ind. Est.	Mullingar	Mullingar	County Westmeath	Industrial Estate	Marketable	6.8
Athlone B&T Park Garrycastle		Athlone	County Westmeath	Business Park	Marketable	13.65
Mullingar B&T Park		Mullingar	County Westmeath	Business Park	Marketable	22.5
Moyne Upper	Enniscorthy	Enniscorthy	County Wexford	Industrial Estate	Marketable	0.39
Wexford Whitemills		Wexford	County Wexford	Industrial Estate	Marketable	1.08
Wexford B&T Park		Wexford	County Wexford	Business Park	Marketable	3.14
Arklow Kilbride		Arklow	County Wicklow	Industrial Estate	Marketable	0.1197

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Property Name	Property Address	Property Town	Property County	Property Type	Property Status	Net Hectares Marketable
Arklow B&T Park		Arklow	County Wicklow	Business Park	Marketable	14.564
Greystones B&T Park		Greystones	County Wicklow	Industrial Estate	Marketable	17.93

Table B: IDA fully occupied sites by county.

Property Name	Property Town	Property County
Cootehill	Cootehill	County Cavan
Mallow Quarterstown Estate	Mallow	County Cork
Brookpark	Dunmanway	County Cork
Underhill	Dunmanway	County Cork
Mahon Estate	Cork City	County Cork
Little Island Estate	Cork City	County Cork
Ballincollig	Cork City	County Cork
Hollyhill	Cork	County Cork
Letterkenny Ballyraine	Letterkenny/Manorcun	County Donegal
Windyhall	Letterkenny	County Donegal
Dublin - South County B and T Park	Dublin 18	County Dublin
Swords - Balheary	Swords	County Dublin
Dubl 5 - Clonshaugh Ind. Est.	Dublin 5	County Dublin
Baldoyle Industrial Estate	Dublin 13	County Dublin
Dubl 12 - Ballymount Ind. Est.	Dublin 12	County Dublin
Clondalkin Industrial Estate	Clondalkin	County Dublin
Cherry Orchard Ind. Est.	Dublin 10	County Dublin
Santry Ave Ind. Est.	Dublin 9	County Dublin
Portumna Business Park	Portumna	County Galway
Loughrea B and T Park	Loughrea/Tynagh	County Galway
Gort Business Park 2	Gort/Kinvara	County Galway
Ballybrit Business Park Lower	Galway	County Galway
Mervue B and T Park	Galway	County Galway
Athenry Business Park	Athenry	County Galway
Gortamullen Estate	Kenmare	County Kerry
Reenard Estate	Cahersiveen	County Kerry
Meilita Road	Kildare	County Kildare
Monread Road	Naas	County Kildare
Kildare Town	Kildare	County Kildare
Castledermot	Castledermot	County Kildare

Property Name	Property Town	Property County
Townpark	Athy	County Kildare
Rathcronan	Ballinalee	County Longford
Coes Rd - Dundalk	Dundalk	County Louth
Ballinrobe Business Park	Ballinrobe	County Mayo
Charlestown Industrial Park	Charlestown	County Mayo
Castlebar Industrial Park	Castlebar	County Mayo
Ashbourne	Ashbourne	County Meath
Ballybay	Ballybay	County Monaghan
Edenderry Industrial Estate	Edenderry	County Offaly
Boyle Industrial Estate	Boyle	County Roscommon
Racecourse Road	Roscommon	County Roscommon
Castlerea Business Park	Castlerea	County Roscommon
Athlone Bunnally	Athlone (Environs)	County Roscommon
Redmonstown	Clonmel	County Tipperary
Gurtnafleur	Clonmel	County Tipperary
Cashel	Cashel	County Tipperary
Spafield	Cashel	County Tipperary
Tallow	Tallow	County Waterford
Clogheran	Dungarvan	County Waterford
Cappoquin	Cappoquin	County Waterford
Gorey	Gorey	County Wexford
Arklow Cemetery Road,	Arklow	County Wicklow
Lisnenan Industrial Park	Ballybofey, Lisnenan	County Donegal
Ballinamore	Willowfield Road, Ballinamore	County Leitrim

Work Permits Eligibility

538. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if consideration is being given to extending employment permits to construction workers and drivers in the construction sector from outside the EU-EEA; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36100/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): 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 Eligible Occupations List (HSEOL) and Ineligible Categories of Employment List (ICEL) for the purposes of granting an employment permit.

Changes to access to the Irish labour market for specific occupations via the employment permits system are made on the basis of research compiled in the annual National Skills Bulletin and the annual Vacancy Overview Report, which is undertaken by the Expert Group of Future Skills Needs, the Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (SOLAS) and coordinated by the National Skills Council. This data, in tandem with a public consultation process which will involve the submission of evidence based cases for inclusion on, or removal from the HSEOL and ICEL, to the appropriate Government Department by sectoral stakeholders, will form the

basis of the bi-annual review process.

Construction workers and drivers are currently included on the ICEL. In order to consider removing an occupation from the ICEL, 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 claim as part of a detailed evidence-based case which would be forwarded by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government as the lead Department for the sector, to my Department for review and consideration.

My Department recently completed a review of economic migration policies underpinning the current employment permits system and the report is due to be published shortly with a review of the lists of occupations for employment permits scheduled to commence in the Autumn.

Brexit Data

539. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of businesses that have availed of the Brexit scorecard to date; the estimated spend in 2018 and 2019 for the measure; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36309/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Enterprise Ireland has introduced a number of Brexit specific programmes to help Irish companies remain resilient in the face of uncertainty. One of these measures is an online “Brexit SME Scorecard” to help all Irish businesses self-assess their exposure to Brexit.

The Scorecard generates a report on weak areas with suggested actions and resources, and information on events for companies to attend, to prepare for Brexit. To date 2,669 companies have availed of the Scorecard. In 2018 Enterprise Ireland’s estimated spend on the Brexit Scorecard is €11,742. No other costs are anticipated for 2018. Enterprise Ireland is not in a position to comment on budgets for 2019 at this time.

While the Brexit Scorecard is available to all companies, Enterprise Ireland client exporting companies that utilise the Scorecard will then be able to engage with the agency’s experts both domestically and through the overseas offices in global markets for support in devising a strategy.

It should be noted that the Brexit Scorecard is only one of a wide range of supports offered by my Department and its Agencies to help businesses prepare for Brexit.

Enterprise Ireland Data

540. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of businesses that have availed of the be prepared grant to date; the estimated spend in 2018 and 2019 for the grant; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36310/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Brexit presents the most significant economic challenge of the past 50 years, and it is important that we prepare for any long-term structural and disruptive change that may emerge. Being prepared is crucial to ensure resilience to emerging challenges.

To promote awareness, and supported by a national Prepare For Brexit campaign, Enter-

prise Ireland designed and launched a €5k Be Prepared Grant that supports the costs of SME clients in preparing a plan to mitigate risks and optimise opportunities arising from Brexit. To date, 127 Be Prepared Grants have been approved to Enterprise Ireland client companies.

In 2018 Enterprise Ireland has approved in excess of €210,000 under the Be Prepared Grant. Currently there is a strong demand pipeline for this support and Enterprise Ireland estimates that €280,000 will be approved by year end. Companies approved funding under this support have 6 months from date of approval to drawdown funding. Enterprise Ireland is not in a position to comment on budgets for 2019 at this time.

Enterprise Ireland supports for enterprise are demand led, and I am confident that sufficient budgetary resources have been made available to EI to support all companies who are eligible for the grant. EI is actively promoting the suite of supports available to client companies to ensure that companies are prepared for Brexit. These include:

- The Brexit SME Scorecard, an interactive online platform which can be used by all Irish companies to self-assess their exposure to Brexit under six business pillars.

- The Act On Programme which provides an independent consultant to companies for a course of two half day to assist them decide on specific actions to address some of the risks and opportunities from Brexit.

- The Strategic Consultancy Grant supports the hiring of a strategic consultant typically to assist the company in the development and/or the implementation of strategic initiatives. It is designed to facilitate business growth as the consultants can act as coach, mentor, facilitator, analyst for the company.

- The Market Discovery Fund specifically supports companies in their market diversification plans. The grant aims to incentivise companies to research viable and sustainable market entry strategies.

- The Agile Innovation Fund has been developed to support product, service and process innovation to build competitive advantage.

- Regional Brexit Roadshows to increase the awareness of Brexit amongst companies.

I am committed to ensuring that there is a wide range of supports, including but not solely the above, offered by my Department and its agencies to help support businesses prepare for Brexit.

Enterprise Ireland Data

541. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of businesses that have availed of the market discovery fund to date; the estimated spend in 2018 and 2019, for the market discovery fund; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36311/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): A key strategy for Irish companies to withstand current global economic challenges is to diversify their export footprint. Enterprise Ireland launched the Market Discovery Fund in January 2018 with the aim of encouraging companies to expand into new markets by helping with the costs of researching viable and sustainable market entry strategies.

The Fund provides support towards both internal and external costs incurred by companies

when researching new markets for products and services. Eligible companies can receive support when they are looking at a new geographic market for an existing product/service, or when looking at exporting a new product/service to a market that they already do business in.

The Market Discovery Fund is available across three levels:

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

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

The Market Discovery Fund has now been open for applications for a number of months and to date, 88 Market Discovery Grants have been approved by Enterprise Ireland. Since the launch of the Market Discovery Grant, EI has approved in excess of €2 million under this initiative. Currently there is a strong demand pipeline for this support and Enterprise Ireland estimates that €4 - 5 million will be approved by year end. Companies approved funding under this support have 18 months to drawdown approved funding. Enterprise Ireland is not in a position to comment on budgets for 2019 at this time.

Enterprise Ireland supports for enterprise are demand led, and I am confident that sufficient budgetary resources have been made available to EI to support all companies who are eligible for the grant. EI is actively promoting the suite of supports available to client companies to ensure that companies are prepared for Brexit.

It should be noted that the Market Discovery Fund is only one of a wide range of supports offered by my Department and its Agencies to help businesses prepare for Brexit.

Brexit Data

542. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of businesses that have availed of the Brexit loan scheme to date; the estimated spend in 2018 and 2019, for the Brexit loan scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36312/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Brexit Loan Scheme provides affordable working capital to eligible businesses with up to 499 employees that are or will be Brexit impacted and which meet the scheme criteria. The €23 million exchequer funding announced in the 2018 Budget (€14 million from my Department and €9 million from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine) has been leveraged to provide a fund of up to €300 million over the lifetime of the scheme. Exchequer spending for the Brexit Loan Scheme is included in the initial contribution from the 2018 Budget.

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

receive an eligibility reference number.

Successful applicants can then apply for a loan under the scheme with one of the participating finance providers using their eligibility reference number. Participating finance providers are the Bank of Ireland, Ulster Bank and Allied Irish Bank. Approval of loans is subject to the finance providers' own credit policies and procedures.

From the launch of the scheme on 28 March 2018 to the end of June 2018, the SBCI received 151 applications. Of these, 132 have been deemed eligible and can proceed to one of the participating finance providers for a loan under the scheme. 10 SMEs have progressed to sanction at finance provider level to a total value of €2.49 million.

The Department will receive a report each quarter from the SBCI on the uptake of the scheme.

It should be noted that the Brexit Loan Scheme is only one of a wide range of supports offered by my Department and its Agencies to help businesses prepare for Brexit.

InterTradeIreland Funding

543. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of businesses that have availed of the Brexit start planning vouchers to date; the estimated spend in 2018 and 2019, for the Brexit start planning vouchers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36313/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): As part of its Brexit Advisory Service, InterTrade Ireland (ITI) offers vouchers which enable companies to get professional advice on how best to plan and prepare for the UK's withdrawal from the European Union. This support helps businesses obtain advice on specific areas such as tariffs, currency management, regulatory and customs issues and movement of labour, goods and services. ITI vouchers are worth up to £2000/€2000 (inclusive of VAT) each. To date, 394 vouchers have been approved for companies on both sides of the border, with 135 applications pending approval.

The forecasted expenditure on these vouchers in 2018 is £581,000, which is approximately €646,000. In 2019, working within current budgetary estimates and assuming changes to the cross-border trading relationships as a result of Brexit, ITI expects to incur expenditure of up to £1.18m (or approximately €1.31m) on this programme.

It should be noted that this is only one of a wide range of supports offered by my Department and its Agencies to help businesses prepare for Brexit.

Departmental Communications

544. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the position in her Department and the organisations under its aegis that have arrangements in place for lo-call numbers or 1800, 1850 and 1890 phone numbers for members of the public to contact her Department or organisations under its aegis; the number of these that are completely free to call to persons that use mobile phones and may incur major bills phoning such organisations; if the situation will be reviewed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36392/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The

following table shows the various 1890 lo-call numbers currently in operation across the Department and its Offices.

Number	Office/Location
1890 220222	Department's Dublin locations
1890 220223	Patents Office, Kilkenny
1890 220225	Registry of Friendly Societies, Dublin
1890 220226	Companies Registration Office, Dublin & Carlow
1890 220227	Workplace Relations Commission, Dublin
1890 220228	The Labour Court, Dublin
1890 808090	Workplace Relations Commission, Carlow
1890 220100	Workplace Relations Commission, Carlow
1890 220600	Workplace Relations Commission, Sligo

If ringing any of the above from a mobile number, the call charges to each can vary depending on the customer's mobile phone service provider. The Department has no immediate plans to change such arrangements but is exploring the possibility of more cost effective options which it could introduce in the future.

In addition to the range of lo-call numbers listed above, customer queries can also be submitted online to dedicated email addresses. These can be found at the Department's website at www.dbei.gov.ie with associated links to the Department's Offices and frequently asked questions pages.

Brexit Staff

545. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if Enterprise Ireland has filled all 39 additional Brexit-related staff posts; if not, when the remaining posts will be filled; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36425/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department has ensured that Enterprise Ireland (EI) has the necessary resources to drive awareness and to assist companies to prepare for Brexit.

EI were provided with additional resources in 2017 and again in 2018 to enable the agency to ramp up supports in light of Brexit to drive improvements in:

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

Enterprise Ireland's funding for 2017 included an additional €1.7 million to assist in the recruitment of 39 Brexit specific posts. 37 of these posts have been filled to date and recruitment is ongoing for the remaining posts.

A further €1.3m was provided in budget 2018 to enable EI to recruit approximately 18 additional staff this year. To date, 8 staff have been recruited and the remaining posts will be recruited as soon as possible.

Enterprise Ireland Data

546. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the budget allocation for Enterprise Ireland since its establishment up to 2018; the number of domestic staff employed by Enterprise Ireland; the number of Enterprise Ireland staff based abroad in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36486/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Enterprise Ireland work with approximately 5,000 companies through a network of market and sector advisors based across 10 national offices and 33 international offices. They also work with the network of 31 Local Enterprise Offices through their Centre of Excellence to support small and micro businesses.

Enterprise Ireland currently employs 556 (FTE) staff in its Irish offices. This figure includes permanent staff and staff on fixed term contracts but excludes Irish Graduates and Work Experience Placement Students.

EI also currently employs 169.5 (FTE) people in its overseas offices. This number includes expats, locally hired staff and staff participating on EI's International Graduate Programme.

My Department has ensured that Enterprise Ireland has the necessary resources to drive awareness and to assist companies to prepare for Brexit.

Enterprise Ireland's funding for 2017 included an additional €1.7 million to assist in the recruitment of 39 Brexit specific posts. 37 of these posts have been filled to date and recruitment is ongoing for the remaining posts.

A further €1.3m was provided in Budget 2018 to enable EI to recruit approximately 18 additional staff this year. To date, 8 staff have been recruited and the remaining posts will be recruited as soon as possible.

The specific information requested by the Deputy in relation to the budget allocation for Enterprise Ireland since its establishment up to 2018 is a large volume of information. Therefore it was not possible to collate all the information in the relevant timeframe. This additional information will be supplied separately as soon as it is available.

Household Waste Collection Price Monitoring Group

547. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission has finalised its report on the operation of the household waste collection market; if the report will be published; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36538/18]

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

Following a formal request on 25 September 2017 from the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, the then Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, in accordance with section 10(4) of the Competition and Consumer Protection Act 2014, requested the CCPC to carry out a study on the operation of the household waste collection market.

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

1. Research on Current Issues in the Waste Sector;
2. An Economic Assessment of the Household Waste Collection Market;
3. An Overview of Waste Collection in Other Countries; and
4. Recommendations

To date, I am informed that the CCPC has carried out an extensive analysis of the household waste collection sector. Actions carried out include a public consultation exercise, a series of interviews and meetings with approximately 20 key stakeholders in the waste market, including those with policy and enforcement roles, and engagement with consumer representative groups, academics, industry representative groups, and individual household waste collection operators.

The CCPC commissioned consumer market research, engaged with other EU national competition agencies on how waste markets operate in their jurisdiction, sought extensive information from over 40 operators and commissioned an external econometric analysis of the data received.

I am informed that the report is currently being finalised and it is likely that it will be published shortly.

Local Enterprise Offices

548. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if funding is available to support a business (details supplied); the details of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36550/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Local Enterprise Office (LEO) in Monaghan is the ‘first-stop-shop’ for advice and guidance, financial assistance and other supports for anyone who wishes to start or grow their own business in the area.

The LEOs provide a ‘signposting’ service in relation to all relevant State supports available through agencies such as Revenue, the Department of Social Protection, Education and Training Boards, the Credit Review Office and Microfinance Ireland. The LEOs can also offer advice and guidance in areas such as Local Authority rates, Public Procurement and other regulations affecting business.

The LEOs can offer direct grant aid to microenterprises (10 employees or fewer) in the manufacturing and internationally traded services sectors which, over time, have the potential to develop into strong export entities. Subject to certain eligibility criteria, the LEOs can provide financial assistance within three main categories: Feasibility Grants (investigating the potential of a business idea); Priming Grants (to part-fund a start-up); and Business Development Grants for existing businesses that want to expand. (It should be noted that the LEOs do not provide direct grant-aid to areas such as retail, personal services, local professional services, construction/local building services, as it may give rise to the displacement of existing businesses). In

addition, there is a Technical Assistance Grant available for eligible micro-exporter applicants who are seeking to explore alternative markets for their product or service.

For anyone interested in starting or growing a business, the LEOs may be able to offer ‘soft’ support in the form of training (e.g. a Start Your Own Business course); a mentor to work with the business proposer; or targeted programmes such as Lean for Micro (to help boost business productivity and competitiveness).

Micro-enterprises may also avail of the Trading Online Voucher Scheme (TOVS) from the LEOs. The Scheme offers the opportunity for businesses to develop their website or digital marketing strategy by availing of vouchers of up to €2,500 or 50% of eligible expenditure.

Anyone with a viable business proposal can also use the LEO to make an application to MicroFinance Ireland, which offers support in the form of loans of up to €25,000 to start-ups with viable business propositions that do not meet the conventional risk criteria applied by the banks. Successful applicants can avail of a more favourable interest rate from MFI if they make their application through the LEO.

I should also draw your attention to the ‘Supporting SMEs’ Online Tool, which is a cross-governmental initiative to help start-ups navigate the range of Government business supports for which they could be eligible. The tool is available at www.supportingsmes.ie. By answering the eight questions in the Online Tool, a small business will, in one location, be able to:

- find out which of the over 170 Government business supports from 27 different Government Departments, Agencies and Initiatives are available to them;
- obtain information on the range of Government supports for accessing credit;
- identify their nearest Local Enterprise Office where they can discuss the outcomes of the guide further;
- download all these filtered results into a document for their further use.

For further information on LEO supports see <https://www.localenterprise.ie/monaghan>.

Work Permits Eligibility

549. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if consideration is being given to adding chiropractors to the list of highly skilled eligible occupations (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36627/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): 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 Eligible Occupations List (HSEOL) and Ineligible Categories of Employment List (ICEL) for the purposes of granting an employment permit.

Changes to access to the Irish labour market for specific occupations via the employment permits system are made on the basis of research compiled in the annual National Skills Bulletin and the annual Vacancy Overview Report, which is undertaken by the Expert Group of Future Skills Needs, the Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (SOLAS) and coordinated by the National Skills Council. This data, in tandem with a public consultation process which will involve the submission of evidence based cases for inclusion on, or removal from the HSEOL

and ICEL, to the appropriate Government Department by sectoral stakeholders, will form the basis of the bi-annual review process.

Since a review of the lists completed in 2015, Chiropractors (who are members of the Chiropractic Association of Ireland) were removed from the Ineligible List and became eligible for a General Employment Permit. This permit type is the primary vehicle used by the State to attract third country nationals for occupations experiencing a labour or skills shortage and holders are eligible to apply for family reunification with the Department of Justice and Equality after 12 months.

My Department recently conducted a review of economic migration policies underpinning the current employment permits system and the report is due to be published shortly with a review of the lists of occupations for employment permits scheduled to commence in the Autumn.

In order to consider an occupation for inclusion on the HSEOL, there would need to be a clear demonstration that recruitment difficulties are solely due to shortages across the EEA and not to other factors. Organisations in the sector would need to provide the necessary data to substantiate their claim as part of a detailed evidence-based case which would be forwarded by the Department of Health as the lead Department for the sector, to my Department for review and consideration.

Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement Legal Cases

550. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of prosecutions initiated and convictions, director disqualifications and director restrictions secured, respectively, by the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36636/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The figures to date (4 September) for 2018 are set out in tabular form below:

No. of prosecutions initiated	Number of convictions	No. of Director Disqualifications	No. of Director Restrictions
1	2	9 (1 by Disqualification Undertaking; 8 by Court Orders)	78 (61 by Restriction Undertakings; 17 by Court Orders)

The ODCE also exercised its right to make certain compliance applications to the High Court under Section 371 of the Companies Act 1963, now Section 797 of the Companies Act 2014, to secure compliance with Orders sought.

However, it should be borne in mind that, working within the context of a rectification policy, many issues can be addressed by exercise of powers without the necessity of bringing issues to the Courts for determination, for example: production of registers; directing the holding of Annual General Meetings; production of minutes of meetings; and regularising breaches of the director loan provisions which, in 2017, secured the rectification on a non-statutory basis, of suspected infringements of the Companies Act 2014, in relation to Directors' loans in 39 cases, to an aggregate value of €15.5m approximately.

The ODCE took a decision in recent years to concentrate its resources on more serious and complex investigations, the result of which is usually the submission of a file to the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) for consideration, as opposed to a summary prosecution.

In terms of prosecutions, the Director of Corporate Enforcement is only statutorily empowered to initiate summary prosecutions (i.e. prosecutions of relatively minor offences in the District Court).

More serious alleged breaches of company law are prosecuted on indictment in the Circuit Court and only the Director of Public Prosecutions (“DPP”) can direct that charges be preferred on indictment.

Furthermore, since June 2015, company directors facing restriction or disqualification proceedings before the Courts, can avoid Court proceedings by voluntarily agreeing to be restricted or disqualified for certain periods. This provision ensures that company directors, who are considered to be in breach of the Companies Act 2014 and facing restriction or disqualification proceedings, are dealt with in an efficient and effective administrative manner without the need for the involvement of the Courts.

IDA Ireland Portfolio

551. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to develop and promote public lands at a location (details supplied) as a suitable location for inward investment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36730/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The IDA Ireland business park in Knockaconny, County Monaghan covers approximately 17 hectares of which 7.56 hectares are currently available for marketing. The IDA is working with Monaghan County Council on planning permission for technology units on the Park to assist in attracting investors to the area.

The Agency is also exploring the potential to attract non-traditional investments into the region. These are projects which do not fall under the general remit of IDA or Enterprise Ireland but which could create investment and employment opportunities.

Brexit Staff

552. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of staff recruited in Enterprise Ireland, LEOs, InterTradeIreland and the IDA since the Brexit referendum in June 2016; the number of new staff hires and replacement staff in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36911/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): As the Deputy will be aware, an additional €3 million was secured for my Department in respect of Pay in Budget 2017 targeted specifically to assist with increased staffing needs for the Department and a number of our Agencies to deal with the evolving Brexit scenario. In Budget 2018, an additional pay allocation of a further €3 million was gained for further strengthening staff resources in respect of Brexit, within the Department and some of its Agencies. These funds have, and are, enabling the Department and, primarily, our Agencies to recruit additional staff to supplement existing staffing numbers in the context of the workload associated with Brexit.

It is important to note however that the work of very many Business Units both within my Department and its Agencies are impacted by Brexit and are working on responding to it despite not being recruited specifically for this purpose.

The specific information requested by the Deputy in relation to recruitment in Enterprise

Ireland, the Local Enterprise Offices, InterTradeIreland and the IDA has been sought, and will be supplied separately as soon as it is available.

IDA Ireland Site Visits

553. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of IDA site visits in each county in quarter 1 and 2 of 2018, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36912/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): IDA Ireland continues to highlight the benefits of expanding or locating in all counties of Ireland to its client base. It is important to remember, however, that the final decision as to where to invest always rests with the company concerned. It is also the case that site visit activity does not necessarily reflect investment potential, as at least 70% of all new foreign direct investment (FDI) comes from existing IDA Ireland client companies.

Site visits nevertheless do represent an important tool through which investors can be encouraged to invest in regional areas and the IDA always does its utmost to ensure that investors consider all potential locations when visiting Ireland.

The table below sets out the number of IDA Ireland site visits to each county in Quarter 1 and Quarter 2 2018.

County	Q1 2018	Q2 2018
Dublin	69	72
Kildare	4	0
Meath	1	3
Wicklow	0	1
Laois	4	2
Longford	0	0
Offaly	0	1
Westmeath	3	9
Clare	4	3
Limerick	8	7
Tipperary	1	1
Cavan	0	1
Louth	6	6
Monaghan	0	1
Donegal	0	3
Leitrim	2	3
Sligo	5	3
Carlow	1	2
Kilkenny	0	2
Waterford	5	9
Wexford	0	1
Cork	10	14
Kerry	0	5
Galway	10	20

County	Q1 2018	Q2 2018
Mayo	2	2
Roscommon	0	1
Total	135	172

Brexit Supports

554. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the figures regarding the Brexit SME loan scheme launched in 2018 by category (details supplied) in tabular form. [36913/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Brexit Loan Scheme provides affordable working capital to eligible businesses with up to 499 employees that are or will be Brexit impacted and which meet the scheme criteria. The €23 million exchequer funding announced in the 2018 Budget (€14 million from my Department and €9 million from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine) has been leveraged to provide a fund of up to €300 million over the lifetime of the scheme.

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

Successful applicants can then apply for a loan under the scheme with one of the participating finance providers using their eligibility reference number. Participating finance providers are the Bank of Ireland, Ulster Bank and Allied Irish Bank. Approval of loans is subject to the finance providers' own credit policies and procedures.

The figures in the table below are those as to end of June 2018. The Department will receive a report each quarter from the SBCI on the uptake of the scheme. A number of requested figures have not been included in this table as they pertain to the relationship between banks and their client SMEs and so are beyond the remit of these reports. Some questions requested the same information and have, therefore, been answered once.

Requested Details (as at 30 June 2018)	-
Number of businesses which have applied to the SBCI to confirm eligibility for the scheme	151
Number of businesses which have had their applications assessed by SBCI	138
Number of businesses which have not had their applications assessed by SBCI	13
Number of businesses which have had a successful application and received an eligibility reference number	132
Number of businesses which had a successful application and received no eligibility reference number	N/A

The number of businesses who did not have a successful application and received no eligibility reference number	6
List of current finance providers	Bank of Ireland, Ulster Bank and AIB
Number of SMEs which have progressed to sanction at finance provider level	10
Total value of loans progressed to sanction at finance provider level	€2.49m
Current interest rate for those in receipt of approved loans	Maximum interest rate under the scheme is 4%

Enterprise Support Schemes

555. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the supports for SMEs by her Department and agencies under her remit, such as LEOs, to help small businesses through training and so on to transition to the PAYE and PRSI payroll reporting requirements from January 2019; and if she has submitted a submission to the Revenue Commissioners or the Department of Finance in this regard to provide support to SMEs. [36917/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Since October 2016, when the then Minister for Finance launched the PAYE Modernisation project in his Budget speech, Revenue has worked extensively with all relevant stakeholders in a co-design approach to ensure the new reporting system reduces the administrative burden on employers to the greatest extent possible. The move to real-time reporting is the most significant change to the PAYE system since its introduction more than fifty years ago. The modernisation programme will bring improved accuracy and transparency for all stakeholders, including employers, employees and Revenue, while also significantly streamlining the entire administration process.

The new real-time reporting requirements will simplify the PAYE reporting process for employers and their agents by eliminating various forms (e.g. P.30, P.45, P60) which are currently required. For the most part the new reporting requirements will seamlessly integrate with the existing payroll process without any additional burden on the current employer. Revenue is working very closely with the Payroll Software Developers Association to design the employer payroll reporting requirements.

Employers who do not use payroll software will be able to comply with the requirements by completing a simple online form on ROS, the data required is in line with what they are currently required to provide on an employee's payslip under employment law.

I am assured that Revenue is also conscious of the very small minority (0.3%) of employers who are unable to use online services. These would typically include situations where internet access is insufficient, or where the employer is elderly or suffers from a disability. Such employers can apply to be excluded from the obligation to submit PAYE returns online and Revenue will make specific arrangements to facilitate manual reporting using customised stationery, to record and submit employees' payroll information in hard copy.

One of the main advantages of the new real-time reporting arrangements is that employees, employers, and Revenue, will always have the most accurate and up-to-date information available in respect of pay and statutory deductions. For example, in the context of an increasing variety of employments, where people change jobs more frequently and multiple concurrent

employments are more commonplace, the availability of this information will assist Revenue in ensuring that each employee gets the full benefit of her/his entitlements each year, particularly if s/he has more than one employment. The current annual (P35) system does not facilitate this and can leave employees at a disadvantage because information is captured on an annual (historic) basis, rather than in real-time.

In terms of communicating the message to all employers, Revenue has been actively engaged in information briefing sessions nationwide. Since January 2017 to date, Revenue teams have presented at over 240 PAYE focused events for a variety of stakeholders including the Small Firms Association, The Irish Farmers Association, Chartered Accountants Institute, Irish Taxation Institute, Age Action, Payroll Providers, Tax Agents and many other representative bodies.

I also understand that Revenue has written to every registered employer in the country and is currently engaged in a large number of regional customer service visits to assist employers with their preparations for PAYE Modernisation. Revenue Seminars are planned for September and October as well as an extensive advertising campaign.

My officials have engaged with Revenue on this matter and will continue to monitor the impact of the new requirements on businesses of all sizes. In 2017, the Revenue Commissioners gave a presentation and hosted a question and answer session for members of the Advisory Group on Small Business (AGSB) on the new PAYE reporting requirements. The AGSB (chaired by Minister Breen) is the principal conduit for SMEs and their representative groups to interact with my Department. It is envisaged that Revenue will attend future meetings of the AGSB for further discussions and to receive feedback on the new system.

Brexit Data

556. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of applicants and participants in Brexit schemes (details supplied) by county; and the amount allocated and expended to each such scheme in each year since being established. [36918/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Enterprise Ireland's (EI's) focus for 2018 is to help clients increase their competitiveness and to diversify their global footprint - key attributes required to be resilient to economic shocks, such as those emerging from any kind of Brexit.

To this end, EI has engaged in a programme of:

- Building resilience in Irish exporting companies focused on innovation, market diversification and competitiveness; and

- Addressing awareness and preparedness of companies to Brexit.

It should be noted that the Schemes detailed below are not a full representation of the wide range of supports offered by my Department and its Agencies to help businesses prepare for Brexit.

Brexit Scorecard

To date over 2,669 companies have used the Scorecard. In 2018, EI spent €11,742 on the Brexit Scorecard.

Questions - Written Answers

County	Scorecards
Antrim	38
Armagh	12
Carlow	34
Cavan	49
Clare	35
Cork	214
Derry	7
Donegal	65
Down	21
Dublin	941
Fermanagh	□5
Fingal	37
Galway	112
Kerry	51
Kildare	87
Kilkenny	33
Laois	27
Leitrim	24
Limerick	63
Longford	14
Louth	74
Mayo	34
Meath	71
Monaghan	89
Offaly	29
Roscommon	24
Sligo	33
Tipperary	66
Tyrone	7
Waterford	46
Westmeath	44
Wexford	45
Wicklow	86
Grand Total	2669

Note: Not all Scorecards reported County

Brexit Act-On Initiative

To date 86 Brexit Act-On Initiatives have been completed. EI has paid €172,000 to date under the Brexit Act-On initiative.

County	Completed
Carlow	5
Cavan	7
Clare	5

Cork	6
Donegal	5
Dublin	25
Galway	5
Kerry	5
Kildare	5
Kilkenny	5
Laois	5
Limerick	5
Louth	5
Mayo	5
Meath	5
Offaly	5
Sligo	5
Tipperary	5
Waterford	5
Westmeath	6
Wexford	5
Wicklow	5
Total	86

Be Prepared Grant

EI has approved 127 Be Prepared grants to companies since its launch, and paid €113,084 out to client companies under this initiative.

County	No. of companies
Carlow	5
Cavan	5
Clare	5
Cork	8
Donegal	5
Dublin	56
Galway	7
Kerry	5
Kildare	6
Kilkenny	5
Laois	5
Leitrim	5
Limerick	5
Longford	5
Louth	5
Mayo	5
Meath	5
Monaghan	5
Sligo	5
Tipperary	5

Questions - Written Answers

Westmeath	5
Wexford	5
Wicklow	7
Waterford	5
Grand Total	127

Strategic Consultancy Assignment

EI has approved 129 Strategic Consultancy Grants to companies. Since the initiative was established EI has paid €1,081,898 to client companies under this scheme.

Client County	No. of companies approved
Carlow	5
Cavan	5
Clare	5
Cork City	6
Cork County	16
Donegal	5
Dublin	41
Galway	5
Kerry	5
Kildare	5
Kilkenny	5
Leitrim	5
Limerick	8
Longford	5
Louth	5
Mayo	5
Meath	5
Monaghan	5
Sligo	5
Tipperary	5
Waterford	5
Westmeath	5
Wexford	5
Wicklow	9
Grand Total	129

Market Discovery Fund

Since it was launched in 2018, 47 Market Discovery Grants have been approved, and a total of €83,060 has been paid out to client companies under this initiative.

Client County	No. of companies
Cavan	5
Clare	5
Cork	5
Dublin	18
Galway	5

Kildare	5
Kilkenny	5
Leitrim	5
Limerick	5
Longford	5
Louth	5
Mayo	5
Meath	5
Monaghan	5
Tipperary	5
Waterford	5
Westmeath	5
Wicklow	5
Grand Total	47

Agile Innovation Fund

EI has approved 24 Agile Innovation Grants to companies since its launch, and a total of €72,336 has been paid out to client companies under this initiative.

Client County	No. of companies
Cavan	5
Clare	5
Cork	5
Dublin	9
Galway	5
Kerry	5
Kildare	5
Limerick	5
Meath	5
Sligo	5
Waterford	5
Westmeath	5
Grand Total	24

Note: This table was launched in 2018 and contains no 2017 or 2016 approvals.

The tables shown present the number of approvals under each scheme. EI does not track application numbers for reporting purposes. All received applications are reviewed in line with grants evaluation criteria. EI does not release the number of approvals per county when the value is five or below to preserve client confidentiality.

Employment Data

557. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her views on the labour force participation rates and in particular the female labour force participation rate in comparison with other EU countries and the EU average. [36920/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The

latest Labour Force Survey release from the CSO for Q2 2018 has shown that participation rates are increasing across the labour force. When comparing year-on-year data, our overall participation rate has increased by 0.5 percent to 62.3 percent. The male participation rate has shown a slight increase (0.1 percent) to bring total male participation to 68.6 percent. The female participation rate has increased by 0.8 percent to bring the total to 56.4 percent. This level of female participation is the highest rate that has been recorded in Ireland since Q3 2009.

In order to make accurate EU comparisons, data is taken from Eurostat's EU Labour Force Survey as published for 2017. This data shows that female participation in Ireland in 2017 was 55.7 percent. This is significantly higher than the 2017 EU average of 51.8 percent. This data identifies Sweden as the country with the highest female participation rate (62.1 percent) in Europe and Italy as the country with the lowest female participation rate (40.9 percent).

My Department recognises the importance of enhancing female participation rates in the labour market. Increasing female participation in the labour market provides us with the potential to both deliver significant social and gender equality benefits, and to address the growing need for skills and talent. With this in mind, the Action Plan for Jobs 2018 has a dedicated action aimed at facilitating female participation in employment. Action 28 aims to identify relevant policy issues for cohorts with low participation rates based on analysis of patterns of labour market participation. My Department is leading on this action and work is currently underway. It is expected that this study will be completed by the end of this year.

Brexit Expenditure

558. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the advertising and promotion expenditure to date, including television, radio, newspapers and on-line, for the InterTradeIreland Brexit grant scheme and Enterprise Ireland's Brexit Be Prepared grant scheme. [36924/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): ITI is particularly well-placed, given its remit to develop cross-border trade, to help SMEs prepare for the particular North-South challenges associated with Brexit. This has been a key priority for the body since the decision by the UK to leave the European Union.

The Brexit Advisory Service was established in May 2017 to provide a focal point for SMEs working to navigate any changes in cross-border trading relationships on account of Brexit. The service includes a range of tailored supports to help businesses prepare for the challenges ahead. As part of the service, ITI has organised a series of awareness events focused on improving knowledge of customs processes and procedures and identifying actions that can be taken in areas such as logistics and supply chain management. ITI also offers vouchers which enable companies to get professional advice on how best to plan and prepare for the UK's withdrawal from the European Union. This support helps businesses obtain advice on specific areas such as tariffs, currency management, regulatory and customs issues and movement of labour, goods and services. ITI vouchers are worth up to £2000/€2000 (inclusive of VAT) each.

ITI has incurred expenditure of £220,000, which is approximately €244,000, on advertising and promotion for their Brexit Advisory Service.

Enterprise Ireland's expenditure to promote their 'Be Prepared' grant amounts to €7,000, which was incurred in respect of digital media platforms only. Enterprise Ireland continue to drive awareness of the wide range of supports available with the roll out of regional Brexit Advisory Clinics this Autumn, which will be in Galway, Dundalk, Waterford and Limerick.

Electrical Contractors

559. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her views on correspondence (details supplied). [36925/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) is the statutory body responsible for the enforcement of competition and consumer law in the State. Section 9(5) of the Competition and Consumer Protection Act 2014 provides that the CCPC is independent in the performance of its functions. As investigations and enforcement matters are part of the day-to-day operational work of the CCPC, I, as Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation have no direct function in the matter.

Additionally, I understand that the Energy (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006 confers powers on the Commission for Utility Regulation to regulate electrical contractors with respect to safety. That Act falls under the remit of the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment.

Departmental Contracts Data

560. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of contracts for market research worth more than €10,000 awarded by the Department of Health in 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018; the value of each contract; the steps taken to ensure that small and medium enterprises were encouraged to apply for the contracts; the number of tenders in each case; the name of the successful company; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35536/18]

598. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of contracts for market research worth more than €10,000 awarded by his Department in 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018; the value of each contract; the number of tenders in each case; the name of the successful company; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35535/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 560 and 598 together.

The Healthy Ireland Survey provides an up-to-date picture of the nation's health, with a robust and credible set of data on a range of health related behaviours and health service utilisation patterns. The Survey involves in-home, face-to-face interviews lasting approximately 45 minutes, with a sample of approximately 7,500 individuals from across all regions, deemed representative of the Irish population aged 15 and over.

The Survey allows the Department to report credibly on a range of issues with significant impact on health outcomes, such as smoking, drinking, diet and obesity, physical activity, and mental health, as well as being able to provide reliable and timely data to fulfil international reporting requirements, to measure demand for health services and to provide up-to-date information to inform policy development and implementation.

In 2014, the Department contracted Ipsos MRBI to conduct the first Waves of the Healthy Ireland Survey, which has been conducted annually since 2015, at a cost per annum of €562,640 (€692,045 including VAT).

This contract expired in 2018, therefore, in line with best practice and the Department's legal obligations in relation to procurement, a Request for Tender was issued in April, 2018, inviting submissions for the conduct of the Survey over the next three to four years. Three ten-

ders were received and evaluated by a Tender Evaluation Panel that included external experts in addition to Departmental officials. In line with the recommendation of the Tender Evaluation Panel, the contract was again awarded to Ipsos MRBI. The annual cost of the Survey under new contractual arrangements will be €719,346 (€884,796 including VAT).

Both the 2014 and 2018 contracts were advertised on the Office of Government Procurement's e-Tenders website in compliance with regulations and best practice guidelines in place at the time of publication. e-Tenders incorporates measures for SME inclusion. It should be noted there are a limited number of companies with the capacity to undertake such research in Ireland. Most, if not all, of these companies either registered an interest in the Request for Tender (RFT) or submitted tenders, indicating sufficient awareness of the RFT.

It should also be noted that the Healthy Ireland Survey is health research, not market research.

Unit Name	Description of services/project	Name of Company	Date (time period)	Cost (inclusive of VAT)€
Health and Wellbeing Programme	Healthy Ireland Survey 2016	Ipsos MRBI	August 2015 - September 2016	692,047
Health and Wellbeing Programme	Healthy Ireland Survey 2017	Ipsos MRBI	August 2016 - September 2017	692,047
Health and Wellbeing Programme	Healthy Ireland Survey 2018	Ipsos MRBI	August 2017 - September 2018	692,047
Health and Wellbeing Programme	Healthy Ireland Survey 2019	Ipsos MRBI	August 2018 - September 2019	884,796

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Review

561. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his plans to address issues with the fair deal scheme for farmers (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35757/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The proposed policy change to the Nursing Homes Support Scheme, to cap contributions from farm assets at 3 years where a family successor commits to working the productive asset, has been approved by Government. Minister Daly hopes to progress legislation in the Oireachtas in the autumn session.

The impact of potential changes to the NHSS will be considered as part of Budget 2019, with changes expected to take effect next year. It is intended that this proposed policy change, the 3 year cap, will be extended to eligible existing participants in long term residential care so that they are not disadvantaged, but that there would be no retrospective recoupment of contributions for those who have paid contributions over and above the 3 year period.

Health Services Staff Remuneration

562. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health when the HSE will receive additional funding to allocate to those section 39 organisations that have pay restoration

obligations as indicated in the HSE report submitted on 11 June 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36090/18]

672. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of pay restoration for HSE staff aligned with disability organisations (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35768/18]

785. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 1592 of 24 July 2018, if the situation between the HSE and section 39 organisations has now been resolved; if the organisations will receive the requisite funding to meet pay restoration entitlements under national pay agreements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36089/18]

949. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the status of the negotiations regarding section 39 workers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36927/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 562, 672, 785 and 949 together.

You will be aware that in February 2018, an agreement was reached at the WRC between the my Department, the HSE and health sector Trade Unions in relation to a process aimed at resolving the pay restoration issue for staff employed by section 39 bodies.

I asked the HSE to engage with the Section 39 organisations to establish the facts around what cuts were applied and how and when they were implemented. The HSE has completed the first phase of their work in relation to the 50 agencies identified as part of the WRC process. This exercise has shown that of the agencies who returned data, a majority did apply pay reductions of some form. It also showed that some agencies made some form of pay restoration between 2016 and 2018.

Two conciliation meetings took place between the parties at the Workplace Relations Commission in July 2018. Regrettably, the unions withdrew from this process and SIPTU has indicated its intention to proceed with industrial action on 18 September 2018.

My Department remains willing to return to discussions at the Workplace Relations Commission.

Services for People with Disabilities

563. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if correspondence from a person (details supplied) has been received and examined; and if a response has been issued. [36282/18]

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.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

564. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health the arrangements being made for the provision of education in the Gaeltacht for a child (details supplied) with severe speech and language difficulties that would include speech and language therapy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36344/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): As the Deputy's question refers to the provision of education, I have contacted my colleagues at the Department of Education and Skills and they have informed me that parents of children with special needs who may need advice or are experiencing difficulties in locating a school placement should contact their local Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) as soon as possible for information on available places. The local SENO contact details are available on www.ncse.ie.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) works in collaboration with the Educational Welfare Services (EWS) of the Child and Family Agency which is the statutory agency that can assist parents who are experiencing difficulty in securing a school place for their child or can offer assistance where a child is out of school. The local service is delivered through the national network of Educational Welfare Officers (EWO). Contact details are available at: www.tusla.ie/get-in-touch/education-and-welfare/.

Children who require speech and language therapy can access assessment and intervention through their local HSE primary care services or disability services. Parents can find out how to access the most appropriate service by calling their local HSE centre.

I hope that this information may be of assistance to you.

Mental Health Services Funding

565. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if proposals to provide additional funding for persons with dementia will be considered in budget 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36480/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): In order to meet the challenges faced by people with dementia, the Irish National Dementia Strategy was launched in December 2014. The Strategy aims to improve dementia care to allow people with dementia to live well for as long as possible and to deliver improved services and supports. The Strategy contains 35 priority and additional actions and its implementation is being led by the National Dementia Office in the HSE. The office has made substantial progress towards developing evidence-based care pathways for people with dementia and progress to date, as well as future plans, is recorded in the mid-term review of the Strategy's implementation, which was published in May this year. Plans are progressing to further implement the Dementia Strategy through the National Dementia Office, including in the area of diagnosis, post-diagnostic supports and care pathways.

In 2016 and 2017, the National Dementia Office partnered with the Alzheimer Society of Ireland on a project to map dementia-specific community-based services and supports. It provides a useful snapshot and baseline study into what, where and when dementia services are being offered. The study has also been used to inform a service finder hosted on the National Dementia Office's website. This allows people to search for dementia-specific community services in their area. There are gaps in access to services and a large variance in what services are provided across the country. The National Dementia Office has met with senior HSE of-

ficials in each Community Healthcare Organisation region to highlight gaps in each area and to develop local action plans to improve service provision.

The National Dementia Strategy calls for the HSE to consider the provision of dementia advisers, based on the experience of demonstrator sites. The appointment of additional dementia advisers will be considered when the results of an evaluation are available.

A priority action in the National Dementia Strategy is the appointment of key workers to coordinate each patient's care and promote continuity, provide expert knowledge and leadership, and ensure that the patient knows who to access for information and advice. Work is under way to further determine the scope and requirements for this role.

As part of the Dementia Understand Together campaign, a national community activation coordinator has been recruited to ensure that the campaign translates into dementia inclusive communities on the ground, including by fostering local dementia champions. The Department of Health has secured Dormant Accounts funding to allow this post to continue until the end of 2019.

With regard to the provision of additional resources, the level of funding available for the Department of Health in 2019 and the quantum of services to be provided by the HSE will be considered as part of the national Estimates and budgetary process and National Service Planning.

Hospital Complaints Procedures

566. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) has not been fully treated at a hospital; if a complaint submitted to the hospital manager will receive a response as a matter of urgency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35413/18]

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

As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly, as soon as possible.

Medical Card Administration

567. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health the reason a medical card issued to a person (details supplied) was withdrawn five weeks after being issued; and if the card will be renewed until the error or issues are resolved. [35414/18]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities

568. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the difficulties being experienced by a person (details supplied) who has two adult children with disabilities and has never been able to access respite care for them at the same time; and his plans to address this anomaly. [35421/18]

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

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

As the Deputy's question relates 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 Promotion

569. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the status of the implementation of the National Men's Health Policy 2008-2013; if a similar policy approach exists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35426/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): Ireland was the first country in the world to adopt a National Men's Health Policy (2008-2013).

In 2013 the Government approved and launched Healthy Ireland, our national framework for action to improve the health and wellbeing of the country over the coming generation. Healthy Ireland is significantly focussed on addressing health inequalities, including those arising as a result of gender, and is the over-arching context within which we are addressing the relevant issues.

Following a review of the Men's Health Policy, the Department of Health and the HSE jointly developed and are implementing a new plan - "Healthy Ireland: Men 2017-2021, the National Men's Health Action Plan"- which provides a continued focus on health inequalities experienced by men, and the momentum with which to tackle them.

The Department of Health and the HSE are working with a range of stakeholders, including the Men's Development Network, the Irish Men's Sheds Association, Sport Ireland, local authorities, local Sports Partnerships, the Irish Heart Foundation and other partners in order to deliver programmes and services to men at a local level, with the aim of improving their health and wellbeing.

The Department of Health and the HSE also support the annual Men's Health Week, which is co-ordinated by the Men's Health Forum in Ireland and which myself and Minister Harris launched in May of this year.

Finally, the Department of Health and the HSE have also recently contributed to the development of a new strategy on the health and wellbeing of men in the World Health Organization European Region which is keen to learn about and share the experience of our collaborative working and approach in Ireland.

Suicide Prevention

570. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if concerns that the majority of recorded suicides here relate to male suicide will be addressed; if the reason for same has been investigated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35427/18]

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, in the context of initiatives by the Executive of implementing the policy Connecting for Life.

General Data Protection Regulation Data

571. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 408, 409 and 410 of 11 July 2018, the way in which persons may access their full medical files and medical history in the context of the General Data Protection Regulation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35428/18]

583. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the way in which persons can access their deceased spouse's full medical files and medical history; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35480/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 571 and 583 together.

Under subject access provisions in the General Data Protection Regulation (2016/679) and the Data Protection Act 2018, a data subject, who is defined as an identifiable or identified natural (living) person, can make a request for personal data, including medical files and medical history to the relevant data controller, for example, the hospital concerned or the HSE.

Information on how to make a request is available on the hospital or the HSE's website. The information requested should be provided within one month and there is no fee. In limited circumstances the response period may be extended to two months, where requests are complex or comprise a number of requests.

Access to medical records may be restricted if the data controller believes that access is likely to cause serious harm to the physical or mental health of the data subject.

In the case of records of deceased persons there is specific provision under Freedom of Information legislation to facilitate access of next of kin to a deceased person's records. An application should be made under the Freedom of Information Act 2014 to the relevant public body, for example the voluntary hospital concerned or the HSE. The Freedom of Information Act does not apply to private hospitals.

Hospital Services

572. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health if the planned invitation of tenders for the new endoscopy unit and other services at Naas General Hospital, County Kildare, can be brought forward to autumn 2018, in order that the project can commence construction in early 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35436/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Health Service Executive is respon-

sible for the delivery of healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond directly you in relation to this matter.

Legislative Programme

573. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health the status of the health (transport support) Bill. [35438/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Deputy will be familiar with the background to the closure of both the Mobility Allowance and Motorised Transport Grant schemes in February 2013.

My colleague, the Minister for Health and I brought a Memorandum to Government on proposals for a new Transport Support Payment Scheme towards the end of the last Dáil session. Following consideration of the matter, it was decided to withdraw the Memorandum from the Cabinet Agenda at the time. A new Transport Support Payment Scheme remains a priority and we intend to revert to Government with revised proposals to reflect the discussions at that Cabinet meeting and further discussions between ourselves, in due course.

It is important to note that the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers scheme operated by the Revenue Commissioners, remains in place. This scheme provides VRT and VAT relief, an exemption from road tax and a fuel grant to drivers and passengers with a disability, who qualify under the relevant criteria set out in governing regulations made by the Minister for Finance. Specifically adapted vehicles driven by persons with a disability are also exempt from payment of tolls on national roads and toll bridges. Transport Infrastructure Ireland has responsibility for this particular scheme.

There are improvements in access to a range of transport support schemes available to persons with disabilities in the State and on-going work is being carried out by Government Departments, agencies and transport providers to further improve access to public transport services. Under the National Disability Inclusion Strategy, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport has responsibility for the continued development of accessibility and availability of public transport for people with a disability.

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

574. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the waiting list in a hospital (details supplied) for orthognathic joint maxillofacial surgery; the number waiting longer than the time specified; the plans being put in place to address this waiting list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35459/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Improving waiting times for hospital procedures is a key commitment in the Programme for Government and in 2018 €50 million was allocated to the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) to provide treatment for patients. Under the Inpatient and Day Case Action Plan, which was launched earlier this year, the HSE will deliver 1.14 million hospital procedures.

The NTPF will deliver additionality to the health system with the provision of over 20,000 Inpatient Day Case treatments through both outsourcing and HSE insourcing.

In addition, my Department is continuing to work with the HSE and the NTPF to identify sustainable initiatives to improve waiting times.

The information sought by the deputy regarding the number of patients on the orthognathic joint maxillofacial waiting list in St James Hospital is contained in the table below.

0-3 Months	3-6 Months	6-9 Months	9-12 Months	12-15 Months	15-18 Months	18+ Months	Total
4	2	4	8	7	8	17	50

Hospital Waiting Lists

575. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of surgery for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35462/18]

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

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

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

576. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35464/18]

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

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

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

Dormant Accounts Fund Management

577. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health if funding for an organisation (details supplied) will be examined in view of the underspend of dormant accounts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35467/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The overall administration of the Dormant Accounts fund is a matter for the Minister for Rural and Community Development. I am aware that his Department recently produced a review of the administration of the fund, including consideration of the underspend issue, from the fund.

With regard to how individual measures are funded, Ministers put forward proposed measures for inclusion in annual action plans. The final annual action plan then details the measures to be funded from the dormant accounts fund. It is then a matter for each relevant Department to deliver these measures, as for any other voted expenditure.

The most recent annual action plan was published in July 2018 and is available on that Department's website, while the next action plan will be prepared within a similar timeframe in 2019. Funding for any purpose must be detailed and approved within an annual action plan.

My Department has received approval for a number of initiatives, including four which will be delivered nationally by HSE Disability Services.

Health Services Data

578. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of assisted living facilities in operation by county and community healthcare organisation; the number of beds available in each county; the occupancy level as a percentage; if there are additional facilities planned; if so, the location of these facilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35470/18]

579. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of applications for assisted living facilities for those diagnosed with dementia and or Alzheimer's; the number of applications granted; the number of applications by persons that have not been diagnosed with dementia and or Alzheimer's; and the number of applications granted in each of the years 2016 and 2017 and to date in 2018. [35471/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 578 and 579 together.

Assisted living in Ireland is generally taken to refer to a form of sheltered housing where the residents have low dependency levels and are able to live for the most part independently, unlike nursing homes whose residents have been assessed as requiring full nursing care.

The Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) is an independent statutory authority established to drive high quality and safe care for people using health and social care services in Ireland. Since 2009 HIQA have maintained a register of all nursing homes whether public or private. This can be accessed through the HIQA website. All nursing homes are expected to provide person-centred, safe and effective services for all residents, including those with dementia.

Sheltered housing developments for older people are not required to register with HIQA, do not come within the remit of the Minister for Health, and the Department of Health is not therefore in a position to supply the details regarding numbers and occupancy levels requested.

The Government intends to establish a new stand-alone statutory scheme for the financing and regulation of home support services. The Department of Health is currently engaged in a detailed process to progress this. The statutory scheme for home support will introduce clear rules in relation to the services for which individuals are eligible and in relation to how decisions are made on allocating services. It will therefore be an important step in ensuring that the system operates in a consistent and fair manner for all those who need home support services. It will also help to improve access to services, in an affordable and sustainable way. The system of regulation for home support will help to ensure that the public can be confident that the services provided, whether they are living in their own home or they living in a form of sheltered accommodation are of a high standard. In the meantime, the HSE has taken steps to improve the quality of Home Support Services provided by it, whether directly or indirectly.

The Department, in conjunction with the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (DHPLG), is currently exploring policy options including supporting housing/housing with care so that older people have a wider range of housing options and choices available to them. A cross Department/Agency steering group chaired by the DHPLG and comprising the Department of Health, the Health Service Executive, the Housing Agency and other key stakeholders was established in 2017 to consider the issues and provide guidance on drafting a joint policy statement on housing options for older people. The draft statement is currently being finalised.

This will be a first step in the broader process of seeking to provide older people with appropriate accommodation options that are suited to their needs. The policy statement will set out a framework by which the Government can facilitate housing, including housing with care, for older people having regard to current demographics and looking at best practice models. The aim is to ensure that people can grow old and live in a community of their choosing, with dignity and independence.

In November I intend to host a joint expert conference on housing for older people, together with the Minister of State with responsibility for Housing and Urban Renewal. The conference will identify and discuss a range of issues including opportunities, barriers and enablers to guide future development of housing and support needs for older people.

Prescriptions Charges

580. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health his plans to reduce the prescription charge further; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35476/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Programme for a Partnership Government contains a commitment to reduce the cost of medicines by reducing prescription charges for medical card holders.

I will continue to examine opportunities to address the cost of the charge to patients, having regard to the funding available.

Hospital Waiting Lists

581. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hip operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35477/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Ser-

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

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

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

582. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35478/18]

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

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

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

Question No. 583 answered with Question No. 571.

Trade Union Membership

584. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the reason the HSE will not facilitate the deduction of union subscriptions at source for the growing number of ambulance service personnel; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35481/18]

604. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health if he will address the continued refusal of the HSE to facilitate payroll deductions of union subscriptions for new members of a union (details supplied); the reason for its refusal to deduct union subscriptions at source for the growing numbers of ambulance service personnel that wish to join the union and exercise their fundamental right to organise and join their union; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35551/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 584 and

604 together.

SIPTU is recognised by the HSE and has negotiating rights for ambulance grades employed by the Executive. As a result, the HSE deducts subscriptions at source for those ambulance staff that are members of that union.

However, the National Ambulance Service Representative Association (NASRA) is not recognised by the HSE and, therefore, does not have negotiating rights. Whilst individuals have a right to membership of any trade union, if they chose to join an association which is not recognised by their employer, such membership is not facilitated by their employer. This means that the HSE does not facilitate deduction of union subscriptions for this particular Association.

Hospital Waiting Lists

585. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35491/18]

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

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

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

Haddington Road Agreement Implementation

586. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 190 of 28 June 2018, if the Health Service Executive, HSE, can provide evidence that the attention of all employees, both in acting positions and not successful in the first round of the Haddington Road agreement, was drawn to circular 17/2013 and the appeals process when it was released; and if so, if he will furnish the evidence. [35493/18]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

587. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for an angiogram for a person (details supplied) will be scheduled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35495/18]

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

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

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

Health and Social Care Professionals Regulation

588. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health his plans to designate, define and regulate formally the title of assistant psychologists in a similar manner to physiotherapists, counsellors and psychotherapists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35501/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 currently provides for the statutory regulation of sixteen designated health and social care professions. Regulation under the Act is primarily by way of the statutory protection of professional titles by confining their use solely to persons granted registration. The structure of the system of statutory regulation comprises registration boards, a committee structure to deal with disciplinary matters, and a Health and Social Care Professionals Council with overall responsibility for the regulatory system.

These bodies are collectively known as CORU and are responsible for protecting the public by regulating health and social care professionals in Ireland. CORU is also charged with the promotion of high standards of professional conduct, professional education, training and competence among the registrants

The grade of Assistant Psychologist is not an established grade in the Irish healthcare system. This grade has been introduced in the HSE on a two-year pilot basis only. Decisions in relation to the future of the grade will be made on completion of the pilot. Therefore, there are no plans at present to regulate the title of Assistant Psychologist.

Mental Health Services Data

589. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of whole-time equivalent psychiatrists in each local health office, LHO; the number recommended under A Vision for Change; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35503/18]

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

Home Care Packages Provision

590. **Deputy Hildegarde Naughton** asked the Minister for Health the home care or other supports available to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35504/18]

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.

Hospitals Data

591. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 380 and 381 of 19 June 2018, when a reply will issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35507/18]

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

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

592. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the reason there is no specific budget for orphan drugs as committed to in the drugs and rare disease policy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35512/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In Ireland the majority of patients access medicines through the publicly funded Community Drug Schemes.

The HSE has statutory responsibility for medicine pricing and reimbursement decisions, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. The Act specifies the criteria for decisions on the reimbursement of medicines including clinical benefit and cost effectiveness and does not include a separate ruleset or budget provision for orphan drugs.

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

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

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

(NCPE).

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

Home Care Packages

593. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the reason the agreed timeframe of 1 June 2018 has not been adhered to following an agreement on revised contracts for Health Service Executive, HSE, home carers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35513/18]

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

Transport Support Scheme

594. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health when the health (transport support) Bill will be initiated. [35516/18]

756. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health his plans to replace the mobility allowance and the motorised transport grant scheme (details supplied) in view of the fact that it has been closed to new applicants for over five years to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36022/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 594 and 756 together.

The Deputies will be familiar with the background to the closure of both the Mobility Allowance and Motorised Transport Grant schemes in February 2013.

My colleague, the Minister for Health and I brought a Memorandum to Government on proposals for a new Transport Support Payment Scheme towards the end of the last Dail session. Following consideration of the matter, it was decided to withdraw the Memorandum from the Cabinet Agenda at the time. A new Transport Support Payment Scheme remains a priority and we intend to revert to Government with revised proposals to reflect the discussions at that Cabinet meeting and further discussions between ourselves, in due course.

It is important to note that the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers scheme operated by the Revenue Commissioners, remains in place. This scheme provides VRT and VAT relief, an exemption from road tax and a fuel grant to drivers and passengers with a disability, who qualify under the relevant criteria set out in governing regulations made by the Minister for Finance. Specifically adapted vehicles driven by persons with a disability are also exempt from payment of tolls on national roads and toll bridges. Transport Infrastructure Ireland has responsibility for this particular scheme.

There are improvements in access to a range of transport support schemes available to persons with disabilities in the State and on-going work is being carried out by Government Departments, agencies and transport providers to further improve access to public transport services. Under the National Disability Inclusion Strategy, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport has responsibility for the continued development of accessibility and availability of public transport for people with a disability.

Nursing Staff Provision

595. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if a return to 24-7 nursing cover on Bere Island to ensure the future sustainability of the island community will be authorised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35517/18]

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

Home Care Packages

596. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the reason the Health Service Executive, HSE, and a union's (details supplied) briefing sessions have not taken place in counties Cork, Kerry and Kildare and western areas of County Wicklow in respect of home carers' revised hours; the areas in which briefings have taken place; the reason some staff have not been advised of their contracted hours; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35518/18]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

597. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35519/18]

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

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

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

Question No. 598 answered with Question No. 560.

Hospital Deaths

599. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if a root cause analysis was carried out by University Hospital Limerick into the death of a person (details supplied) who died in 2017 of sepsis. [35537/18]

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

Hospital Mortality Rates

600. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if University Hospital Limerick has carried out an audit of its sepsis survival rates and mortality rates to establish if early detection and survival rates of sepsis are in line with best practice. [35538/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Clinical Effectiveness Committee (NCEC) in the Department of Health has published a National Guideline on Sepsis ‘Sepsis Management, National Clinical Guideline No.6’ in 2014 which was accredited by the UK National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE). This guideline is available on the National Patient Safety Office (NPSO) page of the Department of Health website.

Ireland was a co-sponsor for the International Resolution on Sepsis, agreed at the World Health Assembly in 2017. The HSE National Sepsis Programme produces an annual report on Sepsis outcomes, which is available on the HSE website.

As this is a service matter, the question has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Acquired Infections

601. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if the family of a person (details supplied) was notified that carbapenemase-producing enterobacteriaceae, CPE, was detected prior to his death; and if CPE was recorded on his death certificate. [35539/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My sympathies are with the family on the loss of their loved one. As Minister for Health, I cannot comment on individual specific cases, however should the family have queries regarding their loved one’s care, they should contact the HSE directly.

Hospital Acquired Infections

602. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if, following the death of a person (details supplied) in University Hospital Limerick in early 2017, an alert was issued to persons with cystic fibrosis attending the hospital as to the dangers of carbapenemase-producing enterobacteriaceae, CPE, for persons with this condition; and if the HSE or his Department has carried out a risk assessment regarding the risk to other cystic fibrosis patients from the super bug CRE both in University Hospital Limerick and throughout the health service. [35540/18]

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

Hospital Deaths

603. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if the coroner was ever notified that extended spectrum beta-lactamases, ESBL, was a significant factor in the death of a neonate in

the maternity unit in University Hospital Limerick prior to 2015. [35541/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): With regard to the information sought by the Deputy, I have asked the HSE to reply to you directly.

Question No. 604 answered with Question No. 584.

Occupational Therapy Waiting Lists

605. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the number of children in Cork city and county on a waiting list for paediatric occupational therapy with the HSE (details supplied); the length of time they have been waiting in six monthly bands in tabular form; the expected waiting time for a child joining the waiting list as at July 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35552/18]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

606. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) can expect an appointment. [35554/18]

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

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

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

Home Care Packages Provision

607. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if appropriate homecare can be facilitated after discharge from care in the case of the daughter of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35573/18]

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.

Medical Card Eligibility

608. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if eligibility for a medical card can be reviewed in the case of persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35584/18]

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.

Medical Card Eligibility

609. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health his plans to grant a full medical card to all those over 80 years of age in view of the fact that 10% of those over 80 do not have a medical card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35592/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am committed to ensuring that we have a medical card system that is responsive and considerate to people's needs and circumstances. Any requests to amend the coverage of medical cards may be considered by the Government in the context of the annual Budget process.

Medical Card Administration

610. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health the reason the threshold for a medical card is not adjusted (details supplied) accordingly; his plans to do so; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35593/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am committed to ensuring that we have a medical card system that is responsive and considerate to people's needs and circumstances. In that regard, the medical card income limits are reviewed annually and considered in the context of the budget.

Hospital Appointments Status

611. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35597/18]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

612. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35598/18]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

613. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if a date has been finalised for planned heart surgery in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35601/18]

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

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

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

Psychological Services Waiting Lists

614. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the number of young persons waiting for psychologist appointments in County Kildare; and the number of months they have been waiting. [35607/18]

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

Psychological Services Waiting Lists

615. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the number of young persons waiting for psychologist appointments in County Laois; and the number of months they have been waiting. [35608/18]

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

Psychological Services Waiting Lists

616. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the number of adults waiting for psychologist appointments in County Kildare; and the number of months they have been waiting. [35609/18]

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

Psychological Services Waiting Lists

617. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the number of adults waiting for psychologist appointments in County Laois; and the number of months they have been waiting. [35610/18]

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 Staff

618. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the educational background required for a counselling position with the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35613/18]

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

Hospitals Policy

619. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) was moved to different rooms repeatedly during a stay as an inpatient in the Royal Victoria Eye and Ear Hospital, Dublin, with the consequence that they suffered a number of severe panic attacks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35616/18]

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

Health Services

620. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter regarding the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35617/18]

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

Maternity Services Provision

621. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 1420 of 24 July 2018, if the legal framework will be brought before Dáil Éireann before it is signed; and if its signature will be subject to the approval of Dáil Éireann. [35621/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As previously advised, while the approval process is one for myself, as Minister for Health, I intend to brief Government once the legal framework has been finalised.

I will, of course, be very happy to share the agreement with the Deputy and the House, as appropriate, in due course.

Home Help Service Provision

622. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if contact can be made with a person (details supplied) with a view to implementing home help in respect of their mother; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35625/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I advise the Deputy to recommend that the family of the person referred to should contact their local health centre, located at HSE Beech House, 101 / 102 Naas Business Park, Naas, Co. Kildare. Alternatively the HSE can be contacted at that location via telephone at 045-920437.

Hospital Appointments Status

623. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health when an appointment will be made for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35626/18]

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

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

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

Orthodontic Services Waiting Lists

624. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when orthodontic treatment will be provided for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35631/18]

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

ferred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Services

625. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health when heart surgery will be scheduled for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35641/18]

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

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

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

Medicinal Products Availability

626. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding his engagement with an organisation (details supplied) and the pharmaceutical industry to ensure new medicines are made available to persons with multiple sclerosis, MS; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35643/18]

643. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if changes to the market access system will be reviewed for new drugs (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35695/18]

733. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the actions he has taken to improve drug approval times for medicines associated with the treatment of multiple sclerosis; the further actions he will take to reduce the waiting times faced by persons to access new medicines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35934/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 626, 643 and 733 together.

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

In line with the 2013 Act, if a company would like a medicine to be reimbursed by the HSE through the community drugs schemes, it must first submit an application to the HSE to have the new medicine added to the reimbursement list.

As outlined in the 2016 Framework Agreement with the Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association (IPHA), and in line with the 2013 Act, the HSE will decide, within 180 days of receiving the application (or a longer period if further information is sought from the company), whether to add the medicine to the reimbursement list, agree to reimburse it as a hospital medicine, or refuse to reimburse it.

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

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

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

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

I have indicated a willingness to meet with MS Ireland and my office is in contact with the organisation to arrange a mutually convenient date.

General Medical Services Scheme

627. Deputy Róisín Shortall asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take to address the issue of general practitioners charging medical card holders for blood tests which goes against their contracts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35644/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the terms of the current GMS contract, GPs are required to provide eligible patients with ‘‘all proper and necessary treatment of a kind usually undertaken by a general practitioner and not requiring special skill or experience of a degree or kind which general practitioners cannot reasonably be expected to possess.’’. There is no provision under the GMS GP contract for persons who hold a medical card or GP visit card to be charged for routine phlebotomy services provided by their GP which are required to either assist in the diagnosis of illness or the treatment of a condition.

The HSE has advised GPs that where a blood test forms part of the investigation or necessary treatment of a patient’s symptoms or conditions, this should be free of charge for patients who hold a medical card or GP visit card. Notwithstanding this, I am aware that some GPs are charging GMS patients for phlebotomy services in some circumstances.

This is a matter of concern for me as it has long been the position, under successive Governments, that no user charges should apply to GP services provided to GMS and GP visit card patients. If a patient who holds a medical card or GP visit card believes he or she has been incorrectly charged for routine phlebotomy services by his or her GP, then that patient should report the matter to their HSE Local Health Office.

Hospital Procedures

628. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to a surgical procedure (details supplied); his plans to introduce same here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35649/18]

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.

Hospital Services

629. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35655/18]

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

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

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

General Practitioner Contracts

630. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Health the reason an organisation (details supplied) is not part of direct negotiations with his Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in relation to a new general practitioner contract and the reversal of FEMPI whereas another organisation is; if the anomaly will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35661/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Government is committed to engaging with the representatives of general practitioners on the development of a package of measures and reforms to modernise the 1989 GMS Contract.

Officials from my Department and the HSE met with the Irish Medical Organisation at the beginning of May to set out the State's position in relation to reform of the GMS contract.

Agreement on the delivery of service improvements and contractual reform has the potential to facilitate a substantial increase in the resourcing of general practice on a multiannual basis.

I have acknowledged that the National Association of General Practitioners is anxious to be involved in discussions about reform of the GMS contract and have already indicated my willingness to consult with them on the many issues facing general practice.

Hospital Procedures

631. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the number of patients at Letterkenny University Hospital who have been referred to other facilities to undergo dialysis in each of the years 2015 to 2017 and to date in 2018; the name of the facilities to which patients were referred in respect of these years; the reason these patients were unable to access dialysis treatment in the hospital in each case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35662/18]

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

Disability Support Services Provision

632. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if funding will be provided for the long-term care of a person (details supplied); and if the application by organisations will be expedited in view of the fact that the case is urgent. [35666/18]

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.

Community First Responders Network

633. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health the funding or support provided to community first responder groups; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35669/18]

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

Occupational Therapy

634. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if an occupational therapy appointment will be scheduled for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35670/18]

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.

Community Care

635. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the way in which community organisations supporting persons with mental health issues can access funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35677/18]

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

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

636. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application by a person (details supplied) for HSE equipment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35678/18]

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

Hospital Accommodation Provision

637. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding hospital beds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35680/18]

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.

Diabetes Strategy

638. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons with type 1 and type 2 diabetes that have completed a structured patient education programme at the end of June 2018 or the latest date available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35681/18]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

639. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons who have been contacted in relation to being on a HSE waiting list; and the number who have been removed from the waiting list for not returning correspondence. [35682/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Good practice around the management of

hospital waiting lists recommends periodic validation of waiting lists.

Validation is the process whereby hospital administration contacts patients on waiting lists at pre-planned intervals during the year to ensure that patients are ready, willing, suitable and available to attend a hospital appointment or wish to be removed.

Importantly, the validation process allows for situations where, if requested by the GP/referring clinician, patients can be reinstated back to their original place on the Waiting List.

In July of this year, I approved the establishment of a Central Waiting List Validation function in the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF). The establishment of the new centralised validation office will put in place protocols and practices which will ensure a standardisation of approach to the validation of all waiting lists across all hospitals.

The new office is expected to commence validation of patient files later this month.

In terms of the number of persons who have been contacted by the HSE in terms of validation activity, and the numbers removed waiting lists, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

640. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35685/18]

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

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

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

Hospital Procedures

641. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35690/18]

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

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

642. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35692/18]

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

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

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

Question No. 643 answered with Question No. 626.

Disability Services Funding

644. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the status of long-term funding for a placement for a person (details supplied). [35698/18]

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.

Disability Support Services Provision

645. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the waiting lists for disability teams for those of schoolgoing age by age group and local health area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35699/18]

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

646. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (detail supplied). [35702/18]

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

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

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

Health Services Provision

647. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the status of a placement for a person (details supplied). [35711/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Status

648. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied). [35712/18]

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

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

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

Hospital Services

649. **Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the status of the case of a person (details supplied). [35713/18]

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

Primary Care Centres Provision

650. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in the opening of the Dungarvan primary care centre; the cost overruns that have been incurred as a result of the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35715/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond directly you in relation to this matter.

Medicinal Products Availability

651. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 1445 of 24 July 2018, the definition of “timely fashion” with regard to the submission of a reimbursement application; the timeline for the application to be processed; if the process can be fast-tracked in view of the fact it is a second time application; if his attention has been drawn to the urgent nature of the application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35721/18]

655. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if an application submitted by a company (details supplied) will be prioritised to ensure the availability of the drug Translarna; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35730/18]

661. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health if a timeline will be provided for the consideration of an application for the drug Translarna by a company (details supplied); and

if he will make a statement on the matter. [35740/18]

667. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 482 of 12 July 2018, the length of time it takes the HSE to conduct a timely review with regard to the relevant statutory framework; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35749/18]

930. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health his plans to make Translarna available through the HSE for young persons needing this particular medication in view of its availability in the UK and in 22 European countries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36762/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 651, 655, 661, 667 and 930 together.

The Health Service Executive has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines under the community drug schemes, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

Accordingly, I have asked the HSE to reply to you directly.

Professional Ethics

652. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if he will request the National Advisory Committee on Bioethics to initiate a review on the topic of conscientious objection within healthcare settings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35727/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Advisory Committee on Bioethics was established to advise the Minister for Health on the ethical and social implications of scientific developments in human medicine and healthcare.

As the Deputy will be aware no decision has been made regarding the next topic on the work programme for the National Advisory Committee on Bioethics.

Health Services Staff Remuneration

653. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the remuneration made available to members of the National Advisory Committee on Bioethics in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35728/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Advisory Committee on Bioethics was established to advise the Minister for Health on the ethical and social implications of scientific developments in human medicine and healthcare.

The National Advisory Committee on Bioethics' membership is multi-disciplinary in nature. The Committee members give of their time and expertise voluntarily, though they may claim for reasonable expenses incurred in relation to attending Committee meetings, for example, travel costs.

There were no expenses claimed by Committee members for the years 2018, 2017, 2016 or 2014 for attendance at meetings of the National Advisory Committee on Bioethics. In the case of 2015, the total remuneration of Committee members' expenses was €701.27.

HSE Legal Cases

654. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the amount spent on legal and-or mediation fees relating to court or legal challenges involving the CervicalCheck cancer screening programme in each of the past four years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35729/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The information requested by the Deputy is not readily available, but has been requested from the State Claims Agency. Accordingly, I will forward the details to the Deputy as soon as it is provided.

Question No. 655 answered with Question No. 651.

Hospital Waiting Lists

656. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35733/18]

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

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

Cancer Screening Programmes

657. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the suspension of screening services for breast and ovarian cancer at St. James's Hospital, Dublin 8; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35734/18]

871. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the status of the screening service at St. James's Hospital, Dublin, for women at a high risk of developing breast cancer; if this service is suspended due to funding issues for new diagnostic machines; the measures in place to resolve the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36484/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 657 and 871 together.

St James's Hospital, as a designated cancer centre, runs a Rapid Access Clinic for Symptomatic Breast Disease.

In parallel with the Rapid Access Breast Clinic, a Familial Breast Cancer Risk Assessment

Service at St. James's Hospital has evolved to provide a clinical service to women who are considered to be at a higher than average risk of developing breast cancer in their lifetime. Due to increased referral rates to the Symptomatic Breast Disease Clinic, as well as to the 'family risk' clinic, the hospital is currently prioritising the symptomatic patients to ensure that a quality, timely and sustainable service is available to them. This has resulted in the suspension of the family risk service, other than for urgent cases.

One of the hospital's two mammography machines which was at end of life has recently been replaced. A third machine is on order and will be available in the coming months. Capacity for mammography has been a major part of the challenge in meeting demand for breast services in St James's.

The intention is to restore the Familial Breast Cancer Risk Assessment Service in St James's as soon as possible and, indeed, to build a programme for hereditary cancers in designated cancer centres over the coming years.

Hospital Staff Data

658. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the staffing levels at the department of psychiatry, Letterkenny University Hospital; the details of the positions and vacancies at the hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35737/18]

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

Hospitals Data

659. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the number of patient referrals made to the department of psychiatry at Letterkenny University Hospital in each of the years 2015 to 2017, inclusive, and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35738/18]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

660. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35739/18]

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.

Question No. 661 answered with Question No. 651.

Medical Products

662. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Health if a ban on the use of mesh for prolapse and urinary incontinence will be considered in view of the severe difficulties it has

caused many women; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35741/18]

708. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Health his plans to ensure that medical facilities for the removal of transvaginal mesh are put in place here, including the appointment of surgeons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35855/18]

859. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health his views in regard to the mesh implant that many women have used for prolapsed bladder; if he is satisfied with its continued use here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36428/18]

861. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Health if the necessary arrangements will be made to allow a person (details supplied) to carry out full removal operations in a hospital here for a six-week period in January and February 2019; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the treatment abroad scheme and the EU Cross-Border Healthcare Directive are not available to women requiring such full removal surgery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36430/18]

908. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health if a full audit by hospital of all transvaginal mesh implants will be arranged; if so, if the audit will include details of all known defective devices; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36625/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 662, 708, 859, 861 and 908 together.

As Minister for Health I am committed to putting in place the measures necessary to ensure that both the current use of Transvaginal mesh implants (TVMIs) in surgical procedures in Ireland, and the ongoing clinical management of women who have had these procedures in the past are in line with international best practice and emerging evidence. At my request, the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) is preparing a report which will make recommendations in relation to the clinical and technical issues involved. I am informed that following policy actions in relation to mesh by health authorities in the NHS and in Northern Ireland in July 2018, as set out below, further engagements with the HSE, the Health Products Regulatory Agency, the professional bodies and colleagues in other jurisdictions were needed for the purpose of finalising the report. I am informed that the CMO's Report is anticipated to be completed in the coming weeks.

Pending finalisation of the report, a number of significant system actions in relation to mesh implants have already been advanced.

The CMO wrote to the Acting Director General of the Health Service Executive on 20 July 2018 to request that the Executive put immediate measures in place to:

This pause is to remain in place pending confirmation of implementation by the Health Service Executive, working in conjunction with the Institute of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (IOG) and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI), of three urgent recommendations relating to:

- (i) Surgical Training,
- (ii) Informed Consent and
- (iii) the Development of an agreed Dataset of Mesh Procedures.

The Department also wrote to the Institute of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland and the Continence Foundation of Ireland on requesting that

they assist the HSE in progressing these recommendations on an urgent basis.

The HSE has published information for patients on its website concerning the pause.

It is acknowledged that there may be concerns that restricting the availability of mesh procedures, particularly SUI mesh procedures, which are widely accepted to be less invasive and more effective than non-mesh alternatives will delay access to treatment procedures for distressing symptoms. Advice received in relation to this is that uro-gynaecological mesh procedures are largely elective procedures and it is not anticipated that a postponement of weeks / months will materially affect health outcomes for the majority of women affected. Given the limited number of surgeons and units carrying out these procedures in HSE funded hospitals, it is anticipated that the Executive will be in a position to indicate to the Department that these recommendations have been implemented within a number of months.

The decision to institute a pause in vaginal mesh procedures in HSE funded hospitals followed a review by Department officials, together with representatives of the HSE and the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA), of the NHS England decision of Tuesday 10 July to institute a similar 'pause' in their use. This decision in the NHS followed a recommendation by the Independent Medicines and Medical Devices Safety (IMMDS) Review established in February 2018 by the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the Rt. Hon Jeremy Hunt MP. On Wednesday July 11, a pause was instigated by health authorities in Northern Ireland.

It has been clarified by the NHS that there is no concurrent change in the evidence base concerning these devices. The recommendations of the IMMDS to NHS England arose because of a lack of certainty or confidence that critical clinical governance measures to assure the safety of mesh procedures are demonstrably in place. The Department considers that similar concerns in relation to the visibility and consistency of such measures apply equally in the public health system here.

There is understandable public and patient anxiety about the ongoing safety of mesh devices in light of the considerable publicity that this issue has received and this has been heightened by recent developments in the NHS. It is important that this be addressed as comprehensively as possible. A pause on the use of mesh procedures, pending confirmation by the Executive that the recommendations as set out above have been implemented, is considered proportionate and necessary to provide public assurance that these procedures are being carried out in accordance with internationally accepted good practice.

The advice of the HPRA to the Department is that it supports a temporary restriction on all procedures involving uro-gynaecological/transvaginal mesh implants, pending the introduction of the further clinical mechanisms proposed relating to the delivery of care for patients. The regulatory status of uro-gynaecological mesh implants at a European level remains unchanged in that they are CE marked medical devices. As such, the benefit-risk profile for the devices is considered positive. Ensuring that the use of transvaginal mesh is appropriate and as safe as possible requires, not only that the device is safe and performs as intended, but also that the healthcare system has appropriate measures for patient selection, treatment and follow-up in place.

In relation to the provision of appropriate aftercare for women suffering from mesh complications, including appropriate diagnostic facilities, this has already been identified as one of two priority recommendations for immediate advancement by the Executive in the course of preparation of the CMO's report. The CMO wrote to the Acting Director General of the HSE, and to the Institute of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (IOG), the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI), and the Continence Foundation of Ireland (CFI) on May 28 2018, requesting that the Executive commence work on (i) the development of appropriate patient information

resources and consent materials and (ii) clarification and development of treatment pathways and appropriate referral services for women suffering from mesh-related complications, in conjunction with the IOG, the RCSI and the CFI.

The HSE has confirmed that work has commenced by the National Women and Infants Health Programme (NWIHP) in the HSE to progress all of the recommendations above. A Learning Notice concerning mesh devices in uro-gynaecological procedures was circulated by the NWIHP on 26 June 2018 to all maternity hospitals and acute hospitals with gynaecological services to highlight the importance of appropriate patient selection, adequate information and consent and also to inform the service providers that a Response Group has been convened to propose remedies for and address the provision of aftercare for complications. This learning notice has been posted on the NWIHP website.

The experiences of women concerned will be an essential element to informing the assessment of need and identifying the aftercare services required. I am informed that a Synthetic Mesh Devices Advisory Group has been convened by the NWIHP which includes three patient representatives, as well as representatives of the HPRA, the IOG, the RCSI, the CFI and all Hospital Groups to advise on and action all of the recommendations.

This work is ongoing and will include identifying the appropriate specialist clinical expertise and facilities required at hospital group level and nationally to provide comprehensive aftercare services. It will also include an examination of the role of and requirement for specialist diagnostic services such as translabial scanning. The outcome of this work will clarify if there is a need to look at sourcing services from abroad to address any shortfalls identified at national level, either through utilisation of the treatment abroad scheme or by commissioning services from abroad.

The HSE advice is that all patients who have experienced complications due to mesh devices are advised to contact their consultant's clinic in the first instance. Each hospital group has nominated an individual to coordinate a response to this group of patients. If patients are having trouble accessing information they can contact the National Women & Infants Health Programme at smi.nwihp@hse.ie for help.

For all patients wishing to access services abroad there are two potential schemes which may be available to patients, namely the Treatment Abroad Scheme and the Cross-Border Directive. Details of the qualifying criteria for both schemes may be found on the HSE website - details below.

It is important to note that both schemes are only applicable for patients accessing care via the public patient pathway. Referrals of private patients or from private hospital consultants are not eligible for consideration under TAS for example, nor can an outpatient appointment in a private capacity be accepted for the purposes of access healthcare under the Cross-Border Directive, however, for the purposes of the Cross-Border Directive, a GP may refer a patient for an out-patient appointment abroad.

It is open to private patients to apply their private health insurance provider in relation to accessing funding towards the cost of treatment abroad. However, if this request for assistance is declined a patient can seek to access treatment through either of the above schemes if they follow the public patient pathway.

Details of both the TAS and CBD can be accessed on the HSE's website or by contacting the office on 056 778 4551.

Hospital Facilities

663. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of the proposed new diabetic unit for Sligo University Hospital; and when capital funding will be sanctioned for building work to commence. [35742/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to you in relation to this matter.

Hospital Appointments Status

664. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive a hospital appointment. [35744/18]

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

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

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

Departmental Funding

665. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if consideration will be given to proposals by an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35747/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The level of funding available for my Department is being considered as part of the national Estimates and budgetary process for 2019 which is currently under way. Pending completion of this process it is not appropriate for me to comment further at this stage.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

666. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the case of a company (details supplied) charging monthly fees to the HSE for use of medical equipment that it failed to collect from a patient; if his attention has been further drawn to similar practices regarding medical units no longer in use that remain uncollected by private suppliers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35748/18]

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.

Question No. 667 answered with Question No. 651.

Hospital Appointments Status

668. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) can expect an appointment. [35752/18]

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

669. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) can expect an appointment in the Royal Victoria Eye and Ear Hospital, Dublin. [35753/18]

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

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

Disability Services Provision

670. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his plans to invest in per-

sonal assistant services that will dramatically change the lives of persons with disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35764/18]

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

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

The level of funding available for my Department is being considered as part of the national Estimates and budgetary process for 2019 which is currently underway. Pending completion of this process it is not appropriate for me to comment further at this stage.

Hospital Appointments Status

671. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment will be scheduled for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35766/18]

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

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

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

Question No. 672 answered with Question No. 562.

Hospital Appointments Status

673. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if the case of a person (details supplied) will be reviewed and referred to the HSE to offer an appointment. [35769/18]

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

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed

national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Hospital Appointments Status

674. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); if the appointment will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35774/18]

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

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

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

Mental Health Services Provision

675. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the status of the new mental health unit in Naas Hospital; and the timescale on the project. [35775/18]

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

Home Care Packages

676. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application by a person (details supplied). [35776/18]

832. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the status of a home care package for a person (details supplied). [36288/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 676 and 832 together.

As these are service matters I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme

677. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the timeline on the proposed introduction of changes to the fair deal legislation to assist farmers and small business owners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35779/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The proposed policy change to the Nursing Homes Support Scheme, to cap contributions from farm assets at 3 years where a family successor commits to working the productive asset, has been approved by Government. Minister Daly hopes to progress legislation in the Oireachtas in the autumn session.

The impact of potential changes to the NHSS will be considered as part of Budget 2019, with changes expected to take effect next year. It is intended that this proposed policy change, the 3 year cap, will be extended to eligible existing participants in long term residential care so that they are not disadvantaged, but that there would be no retrospective recoupment of contributions for those who have paid contributions over and above the 3 year period.

Medicinal Products

678. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the reason he is of the view that an investigation into State accountability for the drug sodium valproate is not required; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35781/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): There are a number of different research projects and initiatives already under way with regard to sodium valproate (Epilim) use in Ireland.

The Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) has compiled an overview of the information provided to prescribers and patients in Ireland with regard to sodium valproate since the drug was first licensed in Ireland in 1975. These documents indicate how the warnings evolved over the years, as new information became available, including those related to the risk of congenital abnormalities and neurodevelopmental disorders in children exposed to valproate during pregnancy.

The HSE's Valproate Response Plan includes proposals for an epidemiological study of the numbers affected by FACS and the development of the existing Irish Epilepsy and Pregnancy Register at Beaumont Hospital.

In addition, the Royal College of Surgeons, in collaboration with the HPRA, will be conducting an impact assessment project on the effectiveness of risk minimisation measures to prevent harms from teratogenic medicines, including sodium valproate. This research will be undertaken within the framework of a HRB Applied Partnership award.

Hospital Appointments Status

679. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); if the appointment will be scheduled urgently; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35782/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its be-

half, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

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

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

Hospital Services

680. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if the case of a person (details supplied) will be reviewed; if a local placement in Castleblayney within the care pathway can be ensured for this person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35783/18]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

681. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment will be scheduled for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35787/18]

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

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

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

Hospital Acquired Infections

682. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons infected with carbapenem-resistant enterobacteriaceae, CRE, in Tallaght University Hospital in 2018, that have died as a result of acquiring same. [35789/18]

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.

Hospital Equipment

683. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 1675 of 24 July 2018, the number of days in 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018 on which MRI scanners were out of operation at University Hospital Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35790/18]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

684. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35791/18]

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

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

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

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Provision

685. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the reason psychological services have been removed from a child (details supplied) who is linked in with child and adolescent mental health services, CAMHS, in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35792/18]

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.

National Clinical Programme for Diabetes

686. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if a series of matters raised

by a group (details supplied) regarding the care and management of type 1 diabetes in County Kerry will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35795/18]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

687. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35799/18]

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

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

Orthodontic Services Provision

688. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a dental appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35800/18]

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

Hospital Services

689. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the name of the person leading the consultation into the services at the Midland Regional Hospital, Portlaoise; the terms of reference of the consultation process; when persons will be contacted about same; the timeframe for the consultation process to be completed; when a report will be presented to him; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35801/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am committed to securing and further developing the role of the Midland Regional Hospital Portlaoise as a constituent hospital within the Dublin Midlands Hospital Group. Since 2014, the focus has been on supporting the hospital and significant work has been undertaken to strengthen and stabilise current arrangements for services at the hospital.

As the Deputy will be aware I have agreed on a consultation process on services at the Midlands Regional Hospital Portlaoise. An external facilitator is to be appointed and the consultation will include opportunities for engagement with stakeholders and interest groups.

Further details on the consultation arrangements will be available in the coming weeks.

Disability Services Provision

690. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if additional resources will be allocated to the NDT in order to facilitate services for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35808/18]

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.

Medicinal Products Availability

691. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Health his plans to make the FreeStyle Libre device available under the long-term illness scheme; and if so, when. [35810/18]

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.

Patient Transfers

692. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a request to transfer from rheumatology services at Manorhamilton to those at Letterkenny University Hospital in respect of a person (details supplied) will be acknowledged and responded to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35818/18]

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

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

National Maternity Hospital Status

693. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the status of the plans for the new maternity hospital at St. James's Hospital, Dublin 8; if a planning application has been lodged; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35822/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In line with best international practice, it is Government policy that standalone maternity hospitals should be co-located with acute adult hospitals. The New Maternity Hospital at the St Vincent's University Hospital Campus will be the first of these to be developed, with the Coombe Women & Infants University Hospital, the Rotunda Hospital and University Maternity Hospital, Limerick to follow in time.

The National Maternity Strategy, published in January 2016, reaffirms the commitment to the provision of maternity services on the St James's Campus and the tri-location of adult, children's and maternity services at St James's will create a centre of healthcare excellence for patients of all ages.

The relocation of the Coombe Hospital to the St James's site is at an early stage and has yet to progress to planning and design phases. Construction of the new children's hospital is currently underway on the St James's site and construction of the new maternity hospital on that site will not commence until after the new children's hospital is completed. I can confirm, however, that the new children's hospital design has incorporated the required operational links with both the maternity and adult hospitals and that a site for the proposed maternity hospital is identified in the St James's campus Master Plan.

Hospital Services

694. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the status of the new endoscopy unit in Naas General Hospital. [35827/18]

695. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health when he envisages the new endoscopy unit in Naas opening. [35828/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 694 and 695 together.

As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to you in relation to this matter.

Hospital Appointments Status

696. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied). [35829/18]

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.

Tattooing and Body Piercing Regulation

697. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health his views on the fact that there is no regulation of tattoo and body piercing businesses here; his plans to introduce legislation to protect the health of users of these services; the reason for the delay in publishing guidelines for this sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35834/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): There is no specific legislation in Ireland in relation to the regulation of tattooing and body piercing businesses. However, they are required to comply with public health as well as health and safety legislation in the same way as any other business. In the absence of sector specific regulation, my Department and the Health Service Executive are finalising guidelines on infection control for use by the tattooing and body piercing industry. The purpose of this document is to provide guidance in relation to infection control, and is aimed at achieving the highest standards of safety and prevention. It will also provide information concerning best practice to people who are considering getting a tattoo or body piercing when choosing an operator.

Tattooing and Body Piercing Regulation

698. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the number of complaints received by his Department and the HSE relating to tattoo and body piercing in each of the years 2008 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35835/18]

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

Tattooing and Body Piercing Regulation

699. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the number of complaints received by environmental health officers relating to infectious diseases or injuries originating from tattoo and body piercing businesses in each of the years 2008 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35836/18]

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

Tattooing and Body Piercing Regulation

700. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the number of inspections carried out by environmental health officers in tattoo and body piercing businesses in each of the years 2008 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35837/18]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

701. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital

appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35844/18]

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

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

702. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment in UHK for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35845/18]

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

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

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

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Data

703. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of children waiting on services for CAMHS by county for more than six, nine, 12, 24 and 36 months, respectively, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35846/18]

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 Funding

704. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost to the HSE of maintaining existing levels of service in mental health services for 2019; if funds will be allocated to address gaps in existing levels of service for mental health; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35847/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The Deputy will appreciate that significant additional funding has been provided for mental health over recent years. It is my intention to continue to improve various aspects of this key service in line with Programme for Government commitments.

The level of funding available for my Department is being considered as part of the national Estimates and budgetary process for 2019 which is currently underway. Pending completion of this process it is not appropriate for me to comment further at this stage.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Data

705. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of child and adolescent services without seven over seven mental health supports; the locations of these services; the number of staff and resources required to provide seven over seven mental health supports; his plans to implement these services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35848/18]

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

Mental Health Services Data

706. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of adult services without seven over seven mental health supports; the locations involved; the number of staff recruited to provide seven over seven mental health supports since 17 May 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35849/18]

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 Act Review

707. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of sections planned for the general scheme of the Bill to review the Mental Health Act 2001; the number of sections that have been drafted to date; the expected date his Department will send the general scheme of the Bill to the Mental Health Commission for review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35850/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The Department is currently drafting the General Scheme of a Bill to amend existing mental health legislation based on the recommendations of the report of the Expert Group set up to review the Mental Health Act 2001, which was published in 2015.

While the Expert Group review had 165 recommendations, approximately 75% relate to changes in legislation. To date a small number of recommendations have been enacted in the Mental Health (Amendment) Act 2015 and in the more recent Mental Health (Amendment) Act 2018 which, of course, Deputy Browne introduced. The Department's initial working draft suggests that there is likely to be in the region of 50-60 heads in the Department's comprehensive mental health amendment bill. I expect that the draft bill will be passed on to the Mental Health Commission for their views by the end of the year.

The Deputy will also be aware that draft Heads of Bill for the provision of deprivation of liberty safeguards for those in residential settings (including approved centres) were published by the Department of Health in December 2017 for public consultation. The Department is currently analysing submissions received and it is intended to publish a report of the findings in September. An Advisory Group comprised of key stakeholders has been formed to consider the findings of the public consultation, advise on appropriate amendments to the draft Heads of Bill and ensure that the approach taken integrates effectively with existing legislation. Every effort is being made to progress the legislation as quickly as possible.

Question No. 708 answered with Question No. 662.

Hospital Waiting Lists

709. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35856/18]

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

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

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

Home Help Service Provision

710. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if additional weekend home help hours will be provided for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35859/18]

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

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Administration

711. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health his plans to remove a disincentive in the fair deal scheme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35861/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): Under NHSS rental income is considered income for the purpose of the financial assessment, and is assessed at 80% less any allowable deductions. Allowable deductions include tax paid to Revenue and therefore any tax paid to Revenue should be deducted from the rental income. Other deductions include health expenses, payments required by law, rent payments and borrowings in respect of a person's principal private residence.

There are currently no plans to amend the financial assessment element of the Scheme. However, Action 17 of the Strategy for the Rental Sector commits the Department of Housing, Planning, and Local Government (DHPLG) to examine the treatment under the Nursing Homes Support Scheme's financial assessment of income from the rental of a person's principal private residence where they move into long term residential care. The Department of Health is currently engaging with the DHPLG in this regard.

Vaccination Programme

712. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the status of the emergence of a link between pandemrix and narcolepsy in children that were administered the swine flu vaccination; when his attention was first drawn to the fact that the issue was a matter of concern; the steps he has taken to address those concerns; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35862/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Final Report of National Narcolepsy Study Steering Committee, "Investigation of an increase in the incidence of narcolepsy in children and adolescents in 2009 and 2010", published on 19 April 2012, set out the facts concerning when knowledge of possible side effects from the pandemic influenza vaccine came to the attention of health authorities. The first reported case of narcolepsy as a possible consequence of the Pandemrix vaccination was identified by the Swedish pharmacovigilance authority in August 2010. The European Medicines Agency's Committee for Medicinal Products for Human Use (CHMP), being the relevant regulatory authority for Pandemrix, continually monitored the reported adverse reactions of Pandemrix and advised member states accordingly.

It is important to remember the context in which vaccination against influenza type A (H1N1) was introduced. On 11 June 2009, following consideration by its Emergency Committee, the WHO raised the Influenza type A (H1N1) alert to Pandemic level 6 which officially declares a pandemic. In Ireland, children and young adults were the most affected groups. Eighty per cent of cases were less than 35 years of age. More than 1,000 cases of confirmed Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza were hospitalised and 100 people were admitted to Intensive Care Units. There were 29 deaths, all but two of which were in 'at risk' groups and most had other significant underlying medical conditions.

The Department of Health activated the National Plan for Pandemic Influenza and, based on the advices of the National Immunisation Advisory Committee, 'at risk' groups were prioritised for vaccination. Vaccination of children was prioritised as the rates of influenza were highest in those groups at that time. The public pandemic vaccination campaign ended on 31 March 2010. Over 1.1 million pandemic vaccinations were recorded giving a 25% uptake for the total

population. Since the 2010/2011 influenza season H1N1 has been incorporated in the seasonal flu vaccine used in Ireland.

A copy of the report can be found on my Department's website: health.gov.ie/blog/publications/final-report-of-the-national-narcolepsy-study-steering-committee-2/.

Abortion Services Provision

713. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if he will clarify his plans to offer abortion services to residents of Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35863/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Work is ongoing on the legislation to regulate termination of pregnancy with the intention of publishing it in the House as soon as possible in this session. This legislation will be based on the General Scheme of a Bill entitled Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Bill approved by Government on the 10 of July and published on my Department's website.

A range of issues are being considered in developing the legislation and operational response to the referendum.

Medicinal Products Regulation

714. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the amount of counterfeit medication estimated to be in circulation here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35864/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) is responsible for supervision of the authorisation, manufacture, wholesaling and placing on the market of medicines for human use in Ireland. The Authority has not, to date, found any falsified (including counterfeit) medicine within the legitimate supply chain that has reached patient level. It has identified and investigated falsified medicines transacted through a small number of wholesalers and, in each case, the medicines concerned were not subsequently sold into the Irish market. The HPRA does not have any remit under intellectual property enforcement legislation and does not keep records under the heading 'counterfeit medications'.

In co-operation with Revenue's Customs Service and An Garda Síochána, the HPRA detains significant quantities of illegally supplied medicines. An amount of these are known to be falsified. In 2017, the HPRA initiated six prosecutions that included falsified medicines, only one of which involved a wholesaler that was authorised when the activity took place, and the remainder were supplies that took place outside the legitimate supply chain. Since 2015, the HPRA has initiated a total of 15 prosecutions that involved falsified medicines.

The HPRA also works with other regulatory and law enforcement agencies worldwide in relation to the illegal manufacture, importation and distribution of medicines, medical devices, cosmetics and other health products. This includes participation in Operation Pangea, an Inter-pol-coordinated international operation against illegal supply, including trafficking, of unauthorised prescription medicines and medical devices via online and social media channels.

Ambulance Service Provision

715. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the level of ambulance cover in County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35865/18]

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

Medical Research and Training

716. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if investment has been made by the health service in CRISPR gene editing technology; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35866/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Deputy may be aware CRISPR is one of the new gene editing technologies which is used mainly in research laboratories in genetic research. The Health Research Board (HRB), which is an agency of my Department, funds a small number of research projects in this area. Projects using this type of technology include research in the area of neurodegenerative disease and breast cancer. In addition, I am advised that a number of projects using genome editing, involving Irish researchers, are approved under the Horizon 2020 EU Programme.

Health research projects in Ireland, outside HRB funding can also take place in fora such as universities and hospitals. Information on these research projects would not be routinely collected by my Department. The Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation may fund research relevant to the Deputy's question through its research funding agency, Science Foundation Ireland.

Orthodontic Services Provision

717. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) can expect an appointment for orthodontic treatment [35877/18]

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.

Maternity Services

718. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the process of the dissemination and circulation of recommendations from internal and external reviews of maternity services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35879/18]

719. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health if each recommendation of each internal and external review of maternity services is circulated and disseminated to hospitals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35880/18]

720. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health if recommendations of internal and external reviews of maternity services have not been circulated or disseminated to hospitals; if so, the reason these were not circulated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35881/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 718 to 720,

inclusive, together.

The National Women & Infants Health Programme has been tasked to disseminate learning from incident reviews and ensure all recommendations are implemented nationally.

Accordingly, I have asked the HSE to reply to you directly.

Hospital Procedures

721. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the process by which recommendations of internal and external reviews are transitioned to learning notices in hospitals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35882/18]

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

HSE Staff Responsibilities

722. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the person in the HSE responsible for a social media account (details supplied) [35883/18]

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

Nursing Staff Provision

723. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his plans to address matters with regard to trainee nursing positions in hospitals (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35886/18]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

724. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person (details supplied) will be expedited; the status of the appointment; the position of the person on the waiting list at the Dublin Dental University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35894/18]

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

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed

national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Home Care Packages Provision

725. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health when a homecare package will issue to a person (details supplied); the waiting time for homecare packages in County Kildare to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35896/18]

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

726. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if it is planned to revise the consent section of the E112 form (details supplied). [35901/18]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

727. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment at UHL; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35917/18]

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

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

Cancer Screening Programmes

728. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the expected waiting time for results for women that have cervical smear tests carried out under the CervicalCheck programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35918/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am aware that issues in relation to CervicalCheck have caused concern for many women, and my Department is working with the HSE to restore confidence in this life-saving screening programme.

The HSE has advised that, due to the increased volume of smear tests which have been carried out in recent weeks, women are experiencing some delay in receiving their results. Currently, results may take up to 12 weeks, but in some cases this may take longer.

Every effort is being made to ensure that tests are processed as quickly as possible, having regard to the high standards required for testing. These delays remain a priority concern for the HSE.

I would like to again emphasise that if a woman is experiencing symptoms which are causing concern, she should consult her GP without delay.

Mental Health Services Expenditure

729. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the capital and annual operational cost of establishing five new publicly owned dementia specific units with a capacity of 20 places for dementia patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35919/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): There is no one capital cost for additional beds/places. The capital cost is dependent on a variety of factors including the clinical requirements and where the places will be provided (whether as an extension or refurbishment of an existing facility or as a new development on a greenfield site).

As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of healthcare services and infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond directly you in relation to this matter.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Eligibility

730. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the cost of extending the nursing home support scheme to all dementia sufferers requiring long-stay care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35920/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): Anyone who has applied for NHSS and is assessed as requiring long-term residential care including dementia patients can avail of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme, regardless of age or condition, as long as the person's care needs can be appropriately met in a nursing home that participates in the Scheme. The applicant can choose any public, voluntary or approved private nursing home. The home must have availability and be able to cater for the applicant's particular needs.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Payments

731. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the cost of increasing the nursing home support scheme maximum agreed prices for private and voluntary nursing homes

by 5% for all places in dementia specific units; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35921/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS), commonly referred to as Fair Deal, is a system of financial support for people who require long-term residential care. The Scheme aims to ensure that long-term nursing home care is accessible and affordable for everyone and that people are cared for in the most appropriate settings.

Anyone who has applied for NHSS and is assessed as requiring long-term residential care, including people with dementia, can avail of the Scheme, regardless of age or condition, as long as the person's care needs can be appropriately met in a nursing home that participates in the Scheme. The applicant can choose any public, voluntary or approved private nursing home. The home must have availability and be able to cater for the applicant's particular needs.

Dementia is an umbrella term for loss of memory and other cognitive abilities severe enough to interfere with daily life, caused by physical changes in the brain. There are over 400 different types of dementia. Not all people with dementia who are being cared for in a nursing home reside in a Specialist Care Unit (SCU) for dementia. Whilst the majority of nursing home residents have some type of cognitive impairment or dementia, only a small proportion of nursing homes operate an SCU for dementia.

The HSE estimate that the current average price for a private/voluntary bed in the NHSS is €1,000 per week, a 5% increase would result in an increase of €50 per bed per week. As there are approximately 17,475 people being supported in private/voluntary nursing homes under the NHSS, a general increase in the NTPF agreed rate would amount to an additional weekly cost of €873,750.

Hospital Appointments Status

732. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the status of the case of a person (details supplied); and when they can expect an appointment in the Midland Regional Hospital, Tullamore, County Offaly. [35929/18]

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

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

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

Question No. 733 answered with Question No. 626.

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

734. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the number of patients on waiting lists at Letterkenny University Hospital for cataract surgery; the number waiting 3, 6, 9, 12, 15 and more than 15 months, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35935/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Improving waiting times for hospital procedures is a key commitment in the Programme for Government and in 2018 €50 million was allocated to the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) to provide treatment for patients. Earlier this year, the Minister launched the Inpatient/Day Case Action Plan which outlines the combined impact of HSE and NTPF activity in 2018 to reduce the number of patients waiting for treatment.

The Action Plan places a particular focus on cataract surgery. All cataract patients who are clinically suitable for outsourcing, and who have been waiting more than 9 months, will be offered treatment by the end of 2018. In total the NTPF will fund 5,000 cataract procedures planned in both public and private hospitals in 2018.

In addition, my Department is continuing to work with the HSE and the NTPF to identify sustainable initiatives to improve waiting times.

Please see table below for requested data concerning the cataract waiting list at Letterkenny University Hospital.

0-3 Months	3-6 Months	6-9 Months	9-12 Months	12-15 Months	15-18 Months	Total
19	15	10	13	9	1	67

Hospital Equipment

735. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the equipment utilised by Letterkenny University Hospital's ophthalmology service; the costings and date of purchase of same in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35936/18]

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

Occupational Therapy Staff

736. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the number of occupational therapists working in CHO1; the number of retirements in the past 12 months; when these positions will be filled; when a post (details supplied) will be filled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35954/18]

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

HSE Properties

737. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health when a site (details supplied) will be sold; and if it will be considered for community use. [35955/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the management of the healthcare property estate, I have asked the HSE to respond directly you in relation to this matter.

EU Conventions

738. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health his plans to ratify the Convention against Trafficking in Human Organs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35957/18]

739. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the reason the Convention against Trafficking in Human Organs has not been ratified; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35958/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 738 and 739 together.

Ireland signed the Council of Europe Convention against Trafficking in Human Organs on 8 October 2015, and thereby signaled its intention to adhere to the provisions pending the development of the necessary legislation to give effect to the Convention.

Ireland will only be in a position to ratify the Convention when the necessary legislation is in place. The General Scheme of a Human Tissue Bill is being finalised at present and will be submitted to Government for approval shortly. This proposed legislation will, among other things, prohibit the commercialisation of human organs and tissue for transplantation and the trafficking of organs for transplantation. In addition, the European Union (Quality and Safety of Human Organs intended for Transplantation) Regulations 2012 which transpose Directive 2010/53/EU provide that a person who procures or sells, including brokering the procurement or sale, for exchange of money or value an organ contrary to the Regulations and the Directive, is guilty of an offence.

Hospital Appointments Status

740. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35962/18]

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

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

Treatment Abroad Scheme

741. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if scoliosis patients that require surgery can avail of treatment elsewhere if they have been waiting more than 18 weeks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35963/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The long-term strategy to develop sustainable scoliosis services has been prioritised by my Department and the HSE in the 2018 HSE National Service Plan. An additional €9 million has been provided to the HSE in 2018 specifically to develop paediatric orthopaedic services, including further increasing access to scoliosis services. The increased investment in the service in 2018 will stabilise and expand the current capacity to meet the demand for timely scoliosis treatment. In 2018, the Children's Hospital Group (CHG) aims to deliver 447 procedures, compared to 371 in 2017 and 224 in 2016.

The HSE operates two schemes which facilitate patients accessing treatments abroad. The first is the Treatment Abroad Scheme (TAS) which applies where the treatment is not available in the Irish Republic hospital system.

The second is under the Cross Border Directive (CBD) and reimburses patients for treatments received in another EU/EEA Member State where the treatment is one which is provided in Ireland. The HSE provides information for patients on the CBD and TAS on its website which can be accessed at <http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/1/schemes> and also through the HSE TAS and CBD Office. The contact details are: HSE TAS and CBD Office, St Canices, Laken, Dublin Road, Kilkenny, R95 P231. Ph: 056 778 4551. e-mail: treatmentabroadscheme@hse.ie. Patients should contact this HSE office to discuss the possibility of availing of either of the schemes.

Hospital Waiting Lists

742. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35964/18]

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

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

743. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35965/18]

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

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

744. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35966/18]

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

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

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

Services for People with Disabilities

745. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a child (details supplied); the reason for the delay in appointments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35967/18]

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 servic-

es 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.

Services for People with Disabilities

746. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive their first appointment from the early intervention team; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35971/18]

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.

HSE Waiting Lists

747. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) can expect an appointment [35973/18]

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

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

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

Ambulance Service

748. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the details of a matter in relation to the National Ambulance Service (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the

matter. [35976/18]

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

Medical Products Supply

749. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health when the drug C1 esterase inhibitor Berinert will be made available by the HSE to persons with hereditary angioedema. [35981/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines in the community drugs schemes, under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

For a medicine to be considered for reimbursement by the HSE, it must first have a marketing authorisation from the European Medicines Agency (EMA) or the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA), before being assessed under the 2013 Act.

I understand that C1-esterase inhibitor (Berinert) is not licensed for use in Ireland.

Should C1-esterase inhibitor (Berinert) receive marketing authorisation, the company may make an application to the HSE for reimbursement.

HSE Waiting Lists

750. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35982/18]

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

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

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

HSE Waiting Lists

751. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35983/18]

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

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

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

Hospital Charges

752. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) is responsible for the payment of their outstanding bill from the Mater hospital. [35994/18]

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.

Hospital Waiting Lists

753. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health the reason urology appointments in UHG have a waiting time of two years; the steps he will take to reduce waiting times; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36004/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I acknowledge that Outpatient waiting times are often unacceptably long and I am conscious of the burden that this places on patients and their families.

The latest NTPF figures show that 57% of patients are waiting 12 months or less for a Urology Outpatient appointment in University Hospital Galway.

Each year 3.3 million patients attend Hospital Outpatient clinics for appointments, with demand for services growing year-on-year. A key component of the management of waiting lists by hospitals is the categorisation of patients by clinical priority to ensure that all patients receive care in a timely and clinically appropriate matter.

Earlier this year, I approved the establishment of a Central Waiting List Validation function in the NTPF. The new office will consolidate and centralise validation activity for all Inpatient/Daycase and Outpatient waiting lists, thus ensuring a standardisation of approach across all waiting lists and all hospitals.

In addition, the HSE is working with the NTPF and my Department to finalise the Outpatient Action Plan for 2018. This plan will support the HSE's compliance with their National Service Plan targets, reduce the growth in the number of patients waiting for outpatient services, improve the accuracy of the waiting list, and trial a number of NTPF funded interventions, including weekend and out of hours clinics.

In relation to urology appointments in UHG, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

754. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when a hip operation will be carried out for a person (details supplied) in County Laois; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36006/18]

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

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

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

Disability Services Data

755. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the multi-disciplinary provision to a school (details supplied) in County Cork for the completed 2017-2018 school year; the planned provision for the 2018-2019 school year; the reason for changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36011/18]

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.

Question No. 756 answered with Question No. 594.

Pharmacy Services

757. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health if agreement will be given to a change in the definition of temporary absence of a pharmacist from a pharmacy; the work that may be done by pharmaceutical assistants as recommended by an organisation (details sup-

plied); his views on whether this will seriously affect the life and work prospects of existing pharmaceutical assistants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36023/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Pharmacy Act 2007 established the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (PSI) and the functions of the Society are set out in the Act. The functions of the PSI are carried out on its behalf by the Council of the Society.

Section 30 of the Act provides for an exception to the general provision in the Act which requires the sale and supply of medicines at a pharmacy to be conducted under the personal supervision of a registered pharmacist, and specifies that no offence is committed where a registered pharmaceutical assistant “acts on behalf of a registered pharmacist during the temporary absence of the registered pharmacist”.

Section 30 also permits the Council to make rules as to:

1. what may or may not be done by a registered pharmaceutical assistant when acting on behalf of a registered pharmacist; and
2. what constitutes the temporary absence of a registered pharmacist.

On June 21 the Council of the Society approved for issuance for public consultation the proposed draft Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (Temporary Absence of Pharmacist from Pharmacy) Rules 2018. This public consultation commenced on 17 July and ran until 14 August and afforded any interested party the opportunity to make representations on the matter directly to the PSI.

Following completion of the public consultation phase, any Rules made by the Council of the PSI are subject to Ministerial consent as per the Act. My role in relation to this process is limited to the consideration of any such Rules once submitted for my approval. No rules have as yet been submitted to me by the PSI.

I must consider any Rules presented to me from a fair and impartial perspective, without prejudice or prejudgement. I await the receipt of the Rules for my consideration from the PSI on completion of the public consultation phase and until that time I am unfortunately not in a position to comment any further on the matter raised.

HSE Waiting Lists

758. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of treatment being proposed for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36027/18]

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

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

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

Pharmaceutical Sector

759. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding new draft rules proposed by an organisation (details supplied); if they have been signed off on to date; the timeframe for the statutory instrument to implement these changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36030/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As you may be aware, the Pharmacy Act 2007 established the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (PSI) and the functions of the Society are set out in the Act. The functions of the PSI are carried out on its behalf by the Council of the Society.

Section 30 of the Act provides for an exception to the general provision in the Act which requires the sale and supply of medicines at a pharmacy to be conducted under the personal supervision of a registered pharmacist, and specifies that no offence is committed where a registered pharmaceutical assistant “acts on behalf of a registered pharmacist during the temporary absence of the registered pharmacist”.

Section 30 also permits the Council to make rules as to:

1. what may or may not be done by a registered pharmaceutical assistant when acting on behalf of a registered pharmacist; and
2. what constitutes the temporary absence of a registered pharmacist.

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Following completion of the public consultation phase I understand that the Council of the PSI will consider the proposed draft Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (Temporary Absence of Pharmacist from Pharmacy) Rules 2018 at its next meeting scheduled on the 20th September 2018. The results of the public consultation undertaken in this regard will be available to the Council. In circumstances where the Council approve these draft rules (with/without amendment) these will then be forwarded to me for my consideration and consent in line with requirements of Section 30 of the Act.

I must consider any Rules presented to me from a fair and impartial perspective, without prejudice or prejudgement. I await the receipt of the Rules and possible commencement date for my consideration from the PSI and until that time I am unfortunately not in a position to comment any further on the matter raised.

Hospital Services

760. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding the provision of services at Monaghan Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36035/18]

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.

Home Care Packages

761. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the number of intensive home care packages by county and by CHO in each of the years 2015 to 2017; the number in place in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36036/18]

762. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the number of intensive home care packages for persons with dementia by county and by CHO in each of the years 2015 to 2017; the number in place in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36037/18]

763. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the number of intensive home care packages being provided by county and CHO in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36038/18]

764. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the number of home care packages being provided by county and CHO in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36039/18]

765. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the number of home help hours being provided by county and CHO in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36040/18]

767. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding home care packages and other services for older persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36042/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 761 to 765, inclusive, and 767 together.

As these are service matters I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Home Help Service Data

766. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on a waiting list for home help hours in County Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36041/18]

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.

Question No. 767 answered with Question No. 761.

Hospital Appointments Status

768. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied)

will receive an appointment for an assessment at the National Rehabilitation Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36045/18]

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

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

Medical Aids and Appliances Applications

769. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if an application for funding for orthotics by a person (details supplied) will be considered. [36052/18]

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.

Medicinal Products Prices

770. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health his plans to fund the drug Spinraza, which has been approved here; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that there are persons with spinal muscular atrophy who are experiencing financial hardship as a result of trying to cover the costs themselves; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36053/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Nusinersen (Spinraza) is for the treatment of 5q spinal muscular atrophy (SMA).

An application for the reimbursement of Nusinersen (Spinraza®) is currently being processed by the HSE. No decision has been arrived at as yet as the statutory assessment process is still ongoing.

The HSE has statutory responsibility for medicine pricing and reimbursement decisions, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. The Act specifies the criteria for decisions on the reimbursement of medicines.

HSE decisions on which medicines are reimbursed by the taxpayer are made on objective, scientific and economic grounds, on the advice of the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE). The NCPE conducts health technology assessments (HTAs) for the HSE, and makes recommendations on reimbursement to assist HSE decisions.

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

Health Care Infrastructure Provision

771. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the status of proposals to re-develop a training facility (details supplied) in County Donegal for adults with intellectual disabilities; if the HSE has formally appraised and assessed an application for capital funding in respect of the project; if so, if approval for the project has been granted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36056/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond directly you in relation to this matter.

Long Stay Residential Units

772. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if all documents sought by his Department in regard to revised HSE proposals concerning the retention of long-stay residential care beds at community hospitals in County Donegal have now been received; if so, if these revised plans will be sanctioned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36057/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The Department of Health is considering the revised HSE proposals concerning the three community hospitals in question in County Donegal which were received in August.

Hospital Accommodation Provision

773. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if an application for funding submitted by management at Letterkenny University Hospital to reopen the hospital's short stay ward will be approved; if so, when the facility will commence operations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36058/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In the light of the Health Service Capacity Review which recommends that the system will need nearly 2,600 additional acute hospital beds by 2031, I have asked my Department to work with the HSE to identify the location and mix of beds which could be frontloaded in 2018 and into 2019 and 2020 to alleviate overcrowding in our hospital Emergency Departments.

My Department has received proposals from the HSE, which identify in the region of 600 additional acute beds and 270 additional residential care beds to be phased in between 2018 and 2020. These proposals are being considered by my Department.

HSE Reviews

774. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 387 of 3 October 2017, if the review carried out within CHO area 1 into in-home and facility-based respite care provision for children with life-limiting conditions and their families, as referenced therein, has now been completed; if the review's findings will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36059/18]

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

Paediatric Services

775. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the number of children with complex needs in receipt of paediatric home care packages by CHO area, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36060/18]

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

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

776. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when equipment will be provided to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36071/18]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

777. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) can expect to receive an appointment at the South Infirmity Hospital, Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36072/18]

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

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

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

Health Services Funding

778. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health if all national clinical leads for the HSE national clinical programmes are freed from conflicts of interest by ensuring that they declare whether they are in receipt of pharmaceutical funding for advisory or other work. [36078/18]

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

Hospital Staff Data

779. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the planned tenure of each hospital clinical director post; and if post holders have exceeded that tenure. [36079/18]

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

Hospital Accommodation Provision

780. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health if an annual commissioning plan for additional hospital beds will be brought forward with regard to the national development plan and the health service capacity review. [36080/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Service Capacity Review indicates that Ireland has among the highest acute bed occupancy rates in the developed world at 94%, significantly ahead of the OECD average of 77%.

The National Development Plan (NDP) provides for a major increase in capacity across the health system, including the development of new dedicated elective-only hospitals in Dublin, Galway and Cork. The aim of these elective-only hospitals is to both increase capacity and to provide for a better separation of scheduled and unscheduled care.

Increasing capacity alone will not address the challenges faced, but on the basis of significant reform over the next 10-15 years, the report recommends an additional 2,600 acute beds by 2031. The NDP provides for the full complement of beds by 2028 - 3 years ahead of schedule.

As a first step toward implementing the recommendations of the Health Service Capacity Review recommendations, I have asked my Department to work with the HSE to identify the location and mix of beds which could be frontloaded in 2018 and into 2019 and 2020 to alleviate overcrowding in our hospital Emergency Departments.

My Department has received proposals from the HSE, which identify in the region of 600 additional acute beds and 270 additional residential care beds, to be phased in between 2018 and 2020. These proposals are under consideration by my Department.

The implementation of this proposal will require a mix of capital investment, including a programme of modular builds. A key element of the proposal is the identification of the workforce requirements and the development of plans to meet these requirements. I have now signed off on a submission in relation to these proposals. The next steps in relation to the resourcing of the plans are currently under consideration within the Department.

Treatment Abroad Scheme

781. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if selective dorsal rhizotomy procedures are available under the treatment abroad fund for persons with cerebral palsy. [36081/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Service Executive (HSE) operates a Treatment Abroad Scheme (TAS), for persons entitled to treatment in another EU/EEA Member State or Switzerland under EU Regulation 883/04, as per the procedures set out in EU Regulation 987/09, and in accordance with Department of Health Guidelines. Subject to

the EU Regulations and Guidelines, 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,
- 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.

All patients in conjunction with their Irish based public referring hospital consultant have the ability to apply to the HSE TAS seeking access to public healthcare outside the State. Each application to the HSE TAS is reviewed individually on its own merits and there are no restrictions on a person making an application to the HSE TAS for review and decision. Each application is for an individual episode of care unless otherwise specified by the consultant on the application form.

Applications to the TAS are processed and a determination given in accordance with the statutory framework prior to a patient travelling to avail of treatment. The presence of a particular illness or condition is not of itself criteria for availing of treatment abroad.

Health Services

782. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health the supports available for persons with cerebral palsy who wish to avail of selective dorsal rhizotomy. [36082/18]

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

Home Help Service Provision

783. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if the provision of a second home help to assist a person (details supplied) will be sanctioned. [36084/18]

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.

Abortion Services Provision

784. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to correspondence from a group (details supplied); if he will meet the group to discuss its concerns relating to the provision of abortion services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36088/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Minister Harris has agreed to meet with this organisation on 13 September.

Question No. 785 answered with Question No. 562.

Assisted Human Reproduction Services Provision

786. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the supports available to persons wishing to access IVF treatments; his plans to extend and increase the number and level of supports and services available to such persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36094/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Currently, patients who access IVF treatment privately may claim tax relief on the costs involved under the tax relief for medical expenses scheme. In addition, a defined list of fertility medicines needed for fertility treatment is covered under the High Tech Scheme administered by the HSE. Medicines covered by the High Tech Scheme must be prescribed by a consultant/specialist and approved by the HSE 'High Tech Liaison Officers'. The cost of the medicines is then covered, as appropriate, under the Medical Card or Drugs Payment Scheme. There is also a limited specialist AHR service available through the HSE, which provides funding for fertility preservation for cancer patients whose treatment is likely to impact on their future fertility.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Government approved the drafting of a Bill on assisted human reproduction (AHR) and associated areas of research in October last year. The introduction of legislation in relation to AHR and associated research is a priority for me and officials in my Department are engaging with the Office of the Attorney General in relation to the process of drafting this Bill. 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.

In order to support the commencement of the legislation, officials in my Department are working with the HSE over the course of this year in developing a model of care for infertility to ensure the provision of safe, effective and accessible services through the public health system as part of the full range of services available in obstetrics and gynaecology.

Part of this work includes identifying policy options for a public funding model for AHR treatment. Once I have had the opportunity to consider these policy options I will bring a Memorandum to Government in relation to a model of care for infertility, including public funding for AHR treatment, for the Government's consideration.

It should be noted that any funding model that may ultimately be introduced would need to operate within the broader regulatory framework set out in the AHR Bill and a model of care for infertility.

Obesity Strategy

787. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of progress regarding the implementation of the Non-Broadcast Media Advertising and Marketing of Food and Non-Alcoholic Beverages, including Sponsorship and Retail Product Placement, Voluntary Codes of Practice; when the monitoring body will be set up to monitor the codes of practice; the timeframe for the designation of the body; the timeframe for the development of guidelines for implementation of the code; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36095/18]

790. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health when the stakeholder forum on the built environment will be convened; the stakeholders and range of stakeholders that will be invited to attend and present; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36099/18]

809. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of each of the 20 priority actions identified in A Healthy Weight for Ireland which have been commenced within the first year; the status of each of the actions individually; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36199/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): I propose to take Questions Nos. 787, 790 and 809 together.

A Healthy Weight for Ireland', the Obesity Policy and Action Plan (OPAP), was launched in September 2016 under the auspices of the Healthy Ireland agenda.

The OPAP covers a ten year period up to 2025 and aims to reverse obesity trends, prevent health complications and reduce the overall burden for individuals, families, the health system, and the wider society and economy. Indeed it must be emphasised that every sector of our society has a role in reducing the burden of obesity and the OPAP clearly acknowledges this.

The policy prescribed 'Ten Steps Forward' that would be taken to prevent overweight and obesity. A new Obesity Policy Implementation Oversight Group was established in October 2017. The current position with implementing these is as follows:

1. Embed multi-sectoral actions on obesity prevention with the support of government departments and public sector agencies

An Obesity Policy Implementation Oversight Group (OPIOG) has been established under the Chair of the Department of Health. It is comprised of representatives from the following Departments and Agencies: Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine; Department of Children and Youth Affairs; Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection; Department of Education and Skills; Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government; University College Cork; the Food Safety Authority of Ireland; the Health Service Executive (HSE) - including the National Clinical Lead for Obesity; and Safefood. The OPIOG held its inaugural meeting on the 19th of October last with further meetings arranged at agreed intervals for the purposes of providing oversight to the implementation of the national Obesity Policy & Action Plan (OPAP). The OPIOG will identify processes for engaging with networks of stakeholders. It will elaborate on this aspect of its functions over the course of its work to implement the OPAP that runs up to 2025. Ultimately, it is under the umbrella of the OPIOG that the overarching ten steps forward and the individual actions listed in the OPAP under these steps are being largely implemented.

The OPAP recommended that proposals be developed relating to the rollout of evidence based fiscal measures, including a levy on sugar-sweetened drinks, in support of healthy eating. As the Deputy is aware the Sugar-Sweetened Drinks Tax commenced on the 1st of May. It represents a positive step in our national policy to deal with the problem of obesity.

2. Regulate for a healthier environment

The development of legislation for calorie posting to support people to make healthy choices is underway by the Department of Health. Currently, a behaviour study on how best to make the posting of calories meaningful to customers and more likely to impact on their behaviours is being carried out by the ESRI. In addition, actions in this area are being progressed through engagement with other Government Departments to support the work of stakeholders involved in planning and developing the built environment.

In line with Actions 31 and 59 of the National Physical Activity Plan, which commit to developing guidelines and support materials for those working in developing the built environment in order to promote the importance of physical activity (31), and to develop a programme of on-going stakeholder communication and engagement to ensure delivery of the Plan (59), it is intended to hold a Stakeholder Forum in November this year. The planned Forum will focus on the theme of the Built Environment.

Planning for the Forum is at an advanced stage, and a number of individuals have been approached with regard to giving presentations. A wide range of stakeholders will be invited to the Forum, comprising key representatives from health, sport, planning, environment, local government and others. Full details of the Forum will be available once finalised.

3. Secure appropriate support from the commercial sector to play its part in obesity prevention

At its inaugural meeting, the OPIOG agreed to establish two sub-groups for Reformulation and Healthy Eating. Both sub-groups have met on a number of occasions since being established and agreed their Terms of Reference.

The Reformulation sub-group will be technical in its work programme. The work of the sub-group will primarily set targets on reformulation of food and drink. It will also make recommendations on addressing reduction of portion sizes and on monitoring and validation procedures.

One of the priority actions under Step 3 of the OPAP was to ‘Establish a forum for meaningful engagement with industry on best practice initiatives towards a healthy food environment’. It is intended to progress this action under the auspices of the OPIOG in 2018. And in this regard, a workshop between the Reformulation sub-group of the OPIOG and Food Sector Stakeholders on reformulation is scheduled for the 20th of September next. The intention is that this workshop will provide an opportunity for detailed engagement with key Food Sector Stakeholders on the challenges and opportunities of reformulation in the interest of promoting the health and wellbeing of the population.

A code of practice for food and beverages promotion, marketing and sponsorship has also been developed involving representatives from the food industry, advertising sector, statutory agencies, and various Government Departments. It was chaired by the former CEO of the statutory Food Safety Authority of Ireland. The Codes of Practice concerned were published in February. In line with the Principles of Governance specified in the Codes of Practice, the process to designate a monitoring body by the Minister for Health is continuing and I expect that it shall be well advanced over the next quarter of 2018. The development of guidance on the Codes is also featuring in this process.

4. Implement a strategic and sustained communications strategy that empowers individuals, communities and service providers to become obesity aware and equipped to change, with a particular focus on families with children in the early years

The previously launched Healthy Ireland 2018 campaign seeks to encourage people to get out and get active together this summer – whether walking with a group, visiting some of our many parks and heritage sites with family or sharing a salad or summer fruit with friends. Building on January’s Healthy Ireland 2018 campaign, which encouraged people to make a small, healthy change, the Summer campaign highlights the benefits of making those changes with others – getting out and feeling good together. Research shows that starting a healthy habit with someone, such as a family member, friend or colleague, is more likely to last than if you do it alone.

A new child obesity campaign from Safefood and the HSE was recently launched. It's called the START campaign and it aims to inspire, empower and support parents to start building and persist with healthy lifestyle habits in the family to prevent childhood obesity. The first phase of the campaign advertising features on TV, radio, video on demand, outdoor and digital platforms. The next phase of the campaign was launched in April.

5. The Department of Health, through Healthy Ireland, will provide leadership, engage and co-ordinate multi-sectoral action and implement best practice in the governance of the Obesity Policy and Action Plan

As referred to at step 1 above, the establishment of an Obesity Policy Implementation Oversight Group is well advanced. New Healthy Eating Guidelines, Food Pyramid and supporting resources have already been published, disseminated and communicated in 2017, including dissemination of the new Guidelines to all primary and post-primary schools.

Work has also commenced on developing Healthy Eating Guidelines for the 1-5 year old age group. As a first step in this work, the Scientific Committee of the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) is currently developing scientific recommendations for food based dietary guidelines for 1 to 5 year olds.

New Nutrition Standards for schools, with an initial focus on school meal programmes funded by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, have also been developed. These Nutrition Standards were published in September 2017. The Nutrition Standards were developed by the Department of Health with the assistance of Safefood and the Health Service Executive, in cooperation with the members of the School Meals Programme in the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection and the Department of Education and Skills.

6. Mobilise the health services to better prevent and address overweight and obesity through effective community-based health promotion programmes, training and skills development and through enhanced systems for detection and referrals of overweight and obese patients at primary care level

A Healthy Eating, Active Living Programme has been established as a Policy Priority Programme within the HSE and a three-year plan for the programme has been finalised. The GP contract for the provision of free care to children under 6 years, already provides that the medical practitioner shall take an active approach toward promoting health and preventing disease through the provision of periodic assessments to child patients.

The HSE is also implementing a Breastfeeding Action Plan and a new Making Every Contact Count brief intervention framework which aims to capitalise on the opportunities that occur every day within the health service to support people to make healthy lifestyle choices.

On the issue of nutrition in hospitals, the HSE is developing a Food, Nutrition and Hydration Policy for Adult Patients, Staff and Visitors in Acute Hospitals. Consultation on the policy has been completed and comments are currently being reviewed. The policy will apply to all locations in Acute Hospitals including Inpatient wards, Emergency Departments, Day Procedure Units as well as all facilities providing food and beverages for staff and visitors. The aim is to improve the quality and safety of food, nutritional and hydration care in our hospitals.

7. Develop a service model for specialist care for children and adults

Professor Donal O'Shea was appointed the National Clinical Lead for Obesity. This appointment will be important in further advancing the implementation of many of the recommendations in the OPAP including the development of a national integrated service model for

the health and social care of overweight and obese people and for developing quality assurance guidance for obesity services.

8. Acknowledge the key role of physical activity in the prevention of overweight and obesity

‘Get Ireland Active! The National Physical Activity Plan for Ireland’ (NPAP) is one of the key developments arising from Healthy Ireland, and implementation of that Plan is well underway in collaboration with the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and a range of other stakeholders.

9. Allocate resources according to need, in particular to those population groups most in need of support in the prevention and management of obesity, with particular emphasis on families and children during the first 1,000 days of life

The implementation of the Healthy Eating and Active Living Plan within the HSE will begin to address this action area, with a particular focus on supporting parents and families.

10. Develop a multi-annual research programme that is closely allied to policy actions, invest in surveillance and evaluate progress on an annual basis

The establishment of the national oversight structure referred to earlier will foster developments under this step of the OPAP.

Stroke Care

788. **Deputy Louise O’Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of the progress with the development of the new five-year stroke strategy; the timeline for the development of the strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36096/18]

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

Departmental Consultations

789. **Deputy Louise O’Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the consultations undertaken by his Department in 2017 and to date in 2018; the status of these consultations; if the results of these consultations have been published; the way in which the consultations feed into policy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36097/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Details of Public consultations for 2018 to date and 2017 are available on the Department’s Website at *health.gov.ie*. There are no consultations currently open for this Department.

Each consultation undertaken is carried out to address specific issues under consideration by the Department. Submissions are not generally published as a final report is not usually produced on the consultation itself.

Consultations inform policy development and or legislation through a variety of means including informing deliberations of working groups tasked with making recommendations to the Minister (e.g. Consultation on Personal Possession of Illegal Drugs) or assisting the Department in implementing Government policy. The Sláintecare Report proposed the geographic alignment of Hospital Groups and Community Health Organisations. The consultation on Geo-

graphical Alignment of Community Healthcare Organisations and Hospital Groups – Towards Integrated and Person-centred Care was undertaken to assist the Department in considering what actions may be taken, and in a manner which is reflective of the broadest possible range of views from stakeholders and members of the public.

In line with Department of Public Expenditure and Reform guidelines, those submitting proposals are advised that their submissions are subject to Department are subject to the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act 2014 and may be released in response to an FOI request.

Question No. 790 answered with Question No. 787.

Hospital Appointments Status

791. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36103/18]

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

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

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

Hospital Facilities

792. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if conditions for patients (details supplied) will be improved at University Hospital Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36109/18]

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.

Hospital Investigations

793. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if the case of poor practice relating to a person (details supplied) in a hospital will be investigated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36110/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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 as soon as possible.

Cross-Border Health Services Provision

794. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in County Kerry who have applied under the cross-border directive for cataract operations in the past 12 months; the number that have had payments issued to them; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36111/18]

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

Medical Card Eligibility

795. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if a change to the assessment guidelines for the over 70s medical card will be considered to take into account net rather than the gross income; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36114/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): There are no proposals at present to amend the current assessment guidelines for the granting of eligibility for medical cards for persons aged 70 and over. However, it should be noted that the gross income limits are reviewed annually and considered in the context of the budget.

Maternity Services

796. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the status of the provision of the 20-week anomaly scan for all expectant mothers at the Midlands Regional Hospital, Mullingar; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36115/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Maternity Strategy is very clear that all women must have equal access to standardised ultrasound services. The Strategy is being implemented on a phased basis and this work is being led by the National Women and Infants Health Programme. The Programme's Implementation Plan for the Strategy includes a number of actions to facilitate the provision by all maternity hospitals/units of dating and anomaly scans to all pregnant women.

Furthermore, additional development funding of €4.15 million is being allocated to maternity services this year. The Programme has prioritised improving quality and safety, establishing community midwifery teams and increasing access to anomaly scans. I understand that the Programme has approved the appointment of an additional 28 ultrasonographers which was the total requirement identified to provide 100% access to anomaly scanning.

Pending the completion of the requisite recruitment and training processes, I am assured that the Programme will continue to work with the six Hospital Groups to assist in increasing access to anomaly scans for those units with limited availability. The Programme is also working with the Maternity Networks to ensure foetal medicine expertise is available when an anomaly is identified. In relation to the status of anomaly scan provision at the Midlands Regional Hospital, Mullingar, I have asked the HSE to reply to you directly.

Health Services

797. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application by a person (details supplied). [36117/18]

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 Staff

798. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the progress in resolving difficulties in regard to the operation of chiropractic services in view of the agreement by all parties at a meeting of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Health that qualified chiropractic practitioners should be allowed to refer patients and carry out x-rays as heretofore; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36129/18]

896. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the progress in resolving difficulties in regard to the operation of chiropractic services and the wish expressed by all parties at a meeting of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Health that qualified chiropractic practitioners should be allowed to refer patients and carry out x-rays as heretofore; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36579/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 798 and 896 together.

This question relates to the transposition of the medical provisions of the Basic Safety Standards Directive (BSSD) by my Department and the request by chiropractors to be designated as referrers and practitioners in the transposing regulations (they are not designated in the current relevant regulations).

I am currently examining the matter, including recent correspondence from the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Health.

Hospital Appointments Status

799. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the status of the case of a person (details supplied); and when a hospital appointment will be expedited. [36142/18]

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

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

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

HSE Reports

800. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide the unpublished report review of public hospital interventional care for acute coronary syndrome patients in Ireland 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36153/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): This review was conducted by the Health Service Executive and as such this PQ has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Services for People with Disabilities

801. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the amount of funding provided to a service (details supplied) in each of the years 2005 to 2017 and to date in 2018. [36155/18]

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 Facilities

802. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of cath labs in operation at St. Vincent's University Hospital, Dublin in each of the years 1978 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36160/18]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities

803. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if the case of a person (details supplied) will be examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36173/18]

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.

Hospital Appointments Status

804. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person (details supplied) will be scheduled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36175/18]

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

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

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

Home Help Service

805. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE will allocate home help hours to a person (details supplied) when needed at weekends; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36176/18]

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

Medical Card Eligibility

806. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health if the need for persons who have had a serious spinal cord injury resulting in lifelong disability to receive a medical card on a needs not means basis will be investigated with an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36183/18]

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.

Hospital Appointments Status

807. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health if an ophthalmology appointment for a person (details supplied) will be expedited; the waiting times for such an appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36194/18]

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

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

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

Services for People with Disabilities

808. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 159 of 30 May 2018, if his attention has been drawn to the fact that no contact has been made with the person regarding an upcoming appointment in August 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36197/18]

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 for direct reply to the Deputy.

Question No. 809 answered with Question No. 787.

Hospital Appointments Status

810. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) can expect an appointment in the audiology department of the Midland Regional Hospital, Tullamore, County Offaly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36200/18]

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.

Speech and Language Therapy Provision

811. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) can expect an appointment with a speech and language therapist at the Health Service Executive, Riverside, Tullamore, County Offaly. [36201/18]

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.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

812. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health if funding will be made available through the HSE in order that a person (details supplied) is awarded a wheelchair that was applied for in March 2018. [36205/18]

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.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

813. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if the definition of medical equipment will be amended such that it encompasses cooling equipment in circumstances in which an applicant for provision of medical equipment by the HSE suffers with hypohidrotic ectodermal dysplasia in view of the fact that at present the HSE will reject such applications such as in a case (details supplied), despite the fact that cooling equipment is essential medical equipment for such persons. [36208/18]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

814. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36209/18]

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

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

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

Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

815. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the reason Huntington's disease is not included on the LTI scheme; if this condition will be added to the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36210/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The long-term illness, LTI, scheme was established under Section 59(3) of the Health Act 1970, as amended. The conditions covered by the LTI are: acute leukaemia; mental handicap; cerebral palsy; mental illness in a person under 16; cystic fibrosis; multiple sclerosis; diabetes insipidus; muscular dystrophies; diabetes mellitus; parkinsonism; epilepsy; phenylketonuria; haemophilia; spina bifida; hydrocephalus; and conditions arising from the use of Thalidomide. Under the LTI Scheme, patients receive drugs, medicines, and medical and surgical appliances directly related to the treatment of their illness, free of charge.

There are no plans to extend the list of conditions covered by the scheme.

Audiology Services Provision

816. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health when an audiology appointment date will be issued to a person (details supplied); the reason for the delay in issuing the appointment in view of the fact that several referrals have been made in this case; if further medical conditions will be taken into account; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36215/18]

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.

Audiology Services Provision

817. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health when an audiology appointment date will be issued to a person (details supplied); the reason for the delay in issuing the appointment in view of the fact that several referrals have been made in this case; if further medical conditions will be taken into account; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36216/18]

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.

Long-Term Illness Scheme

818. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if the directive issued by his Department in 2004, stating the guidelines for the dispensing of prescribed medication for the LTI and hi-tech PCRS schemes, will be altered in order to allow persons who are working abroad for a set period to be furnished with prescriptions for periods of longer than three months as is currently the case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36228/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department's view is that a maximum of a three-month supply provides sufficient time for Irish patients moving abroad to identify an appropriate practitioner and to arrange for the supply of required medication locally, under the supply arrangements prevailing in the country concerned. There are no plans to change this position.

Hospital Appointments Status

819. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36231/18]

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

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

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

Hospitals Data

820. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of catheterisation laboratories operational in acute hospitals here in each of the years 2010 to 2017 and to date in 2018, by hospital in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36237/18]

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.

Hospitals Data

821. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health if the number of catheterisation laboratories operational here has changed since 2015; the hospitals that have secured an additional laboratory since 2015; his plans to increase the number of laboratories in hospitals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36238/18]

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.

Hospitals Data

822. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of cardiac procedures carried out in all acute hospitals here, including angiography, PCI, permanent pacemaker and implantable defibrillator, in each of the years 2013 to 2017 and to date in 2018, by hospital; the number of laboratories operational in each hospital; the number of procedures carried out in each laboratory in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36239/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Deputy is aware, I established a national review of specialised cardiac services, which is now underway, with the aim of achieving the best patient outcomes at population level by establishing the need for an optimal configuration of a national adult cardiac service with a particular emphasis on the safety, quality and sustainability of the services that patients receive. To this end, the information on cath lab activities and procedures that the deputy is seeking is being collected by the national review to form part of its analysis and will be published as such in due course.

Hospitals Data

823. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of catheterisation laboratories operational at St. Vincent's University Hospital in each of the years 2010 to 2017 and to date in 2018; the number of procedures carried out in each laboratory by year and procedure in tabular form; his plans to increase laboratory activity at the hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36240/18]

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.

Hospitals Data

824. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the make-up of a basic grade catheterisation laboratory C-arm unit; the way in which this differs from a fully functioning catheterisation laboratory carrying the full range of angiography, PCI and installation of pace-makers and so on; the number of such laboratories operational here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36241/18]

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.

Hospital Appointments Delays

825. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if the repeated cancellation of surgery for a person (details supplied) will be investigated; and if the surgery will be rescheduled. [36243/18]

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

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

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

Illicit Trade in Tobacco

826. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Health the reason no statistics on non-Irish duty-paid and illicit tobacco products were included in the Tobacco Free Ireland report released in July 2018; if his attention has been drawn to the reason this information was omitted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36250/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The illicit trade of tobacco in Ireland is a matter for the Office of the Revenue Commissioners and as such the information referred to by the Deputy is not contained in the annual reports of Tobacco Free Ireland.

Hospital Appointments Status

827. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36251/18]

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

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

828. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36262/18]

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

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

829. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person (details supplied) who is on a waiting list for pain management at University Hospital Galway and also on a waiting list for a procedure at the hospital will be prioritised in view of the unique circumstances of their diagnosis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36267/18]

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

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing sched-

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

830. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36272/18]

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

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

831. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied). [36287/18]

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

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

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

Question No. 832 answered with Question No. 676.

Mental Health Services Staff

833. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of approved child psychiatrist posts; the number recommended under A Vision for Change; the number vacant; the location of such vacancies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36291/18]

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.

Orthodontic Services Waiting Lists

834. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of children in County Wexford awaiting orthodontic treatment; the number of those waiting more than 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36292/18]

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.

Medical Card Eligibility

835. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health when a decision will issue regarding a medical card application by a person (details supplied). [36294/18]

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

Cross-Border Health Services Provision

836. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the status of the cross-border directive specifically in respect to the United Kingdom in the event of a no-deal Brexit; if he is making provisions for such a scenario; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36303/18]

837. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the status of appointments to be scheduled under the cross-border directive for March 2019 and beyond; if those appointments will be honoured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36304/18]

838. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health his plans to halt the cross-border directive in view of the uncertainty surrounding the situation post-Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36305/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 836 to 838, inclusive, together.

There is no question that Brexit poses very significant and serious challenges to Ireland's economy and trade, as well as across a range of other sectors, including healthcare. Detailed work is underway in the Department of Health, to prepare for the UK's exit. This includes con-

tingency planning for all possible scenarios.

The Irish and UK Governments are committed to maintaining the reciprocal rights of access to healthcare for both Irish and UK citizens to publicly funded health services. Technical discussions, involving the Department's of Health from Ireland, Northern Ireland and the UK on how to maintain these arrangements post-Brexit are currently ongoing includes work on the Cross Border Directive.

It is important to emphasise that at present there are no changes to patient care, as the UK continues to be a full member of the EU. Indeed until the UK formally withdraws from the European Union, it remains a full Member with all of its existing rights and obligations.

Autism Support Services

839. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health when the 2017 review of the HSE National Review of Autism Services, Past, Present and Way Forward 2012 (details supplied) will be published. [36306/18]

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

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

Long-Term Illness Scheme Eligibility

840. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if the addition of asthma to the list of conditions covered by the long-term illness scheme has been considered in view of the significant medical costs incurred by the families of those who have the condition; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36308/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The LTI Scheme was established under Section 59(3) of the Health Act 1970 (as amended). The conditions covered by the LTI are: acute leukaemia; mental handicap; cerebral palsy; mental illness (in a person under 16); cystic fibrosis; multiple sclerosis; diabetes insipidus; muscular dystrophies; diabetes mellitus; Parkinsonism; epilepsy; phenylketonuria; haemophilia; spina bifida; hydrocephalus; and conditions arising from the use of Thalidomide. Under the LTI Scheme, patients receive drugs, medicines, and medical and surgical appliances directly related to the treatment of their illness, free of charge.

There are no plans to extend the list of conditions covered by the Scheme.

Hospital Appointments Status

841. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in Dublin 7 will secure an appointment for knee surgery at Cappagh Hospital.

[36315/18]

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

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

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

Hospital Charges

842. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Health if a matter (details supplied) regarding charges for a procedure will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36323/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): It is not possible to comment on individual procedures without knowing the circumstances and clinical decisions involved. And as Minister for Health, I have no role in the commercial decisions of any health insurer.

The charges that apply for a private patient in a public setting are subject to the Health (Amendment) Act 2013 while the charges that apply in a private setting are the subject of negotiation between the health insurer and the health service provider. It should be noted that in our community-rated health insurance market, an individual's premium will not be affected by their own claims history.

The Government is committed to enhancing primary and community care, in line with international evidence showing that care should take place in an appropriate setting at the level of lowest complexity. However, it is not always possible for care to take place in a GP setting.

Services for People with Disabilities

843. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if additional resources will be made available for the provision of full-time residential care in County Kerry in view of the fact that there are a number of emergency cases awaiting beds in the county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36328/18]

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.

Mental Health Services Provision

844. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if a series of matters relating to mental health services (details supplied) will be examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36336/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): Mental health is a priority for the Government. This is reflected through significant increases in the funding committed to this area. The HSE Mental Health budget has been increased by over €200 million since 2012. Around €911 million has been provided for the Executive this year.

The Government recognises the need to provide effective and timely care for those in need. The range of services raised by the Deputy continue to be developed as part of implementation of A Vision for Change, and are reflected in the agreed HSE annual Service Plans.

In relation to crisis access to mental health services, steps were initially taken to progress the improved out-of-hours access to mental health services initiative in 2017. The HSE mapped all 114 Adult Mental Teams to determine the existing level of 7/7 service provision. The results of this exercise showed that there currently is approximately 60% coverage across the nine CHOs of 7/7 cover comprising of a combination of Assertive Outreach, Home-Based Treatment Teams and nurse-provided cover.

As part of Programme for Government funding in 2017, approximately €4.5 million was sought and was granted for the staffing and non-staffing costs associated with an enhanced service. A consultation process with all nine CHOs then took place to agree staffing numbers and professions. The HSE is now in final stages of recruiting staff required to deliver 7/7 Mental Health service cover for the areas that do not currently have a service in place. The HSE have recruited approximately 50% of the additional staff required to provide a countrywide 7/7 Mental Health service, with interviews for remaining posts completed around mid-August last.

Additional approaches are also being considered to ensure that those in need of services and support can access these services in the most effective way. It is likely that the future development in Digital response to Mental Health issues will form a part of the overall response. I am strongly supportive of the increased use of technology in the delivery of mental health services, particularly that relating to Prevention and Early Intervention. I am progressing a tele-psychiatry pilot project to ascertain the merits of delivering care from a distance using technology and video-conferencing.

Hospitals Building Programme

845. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health the status of the extension and refurbishment works at Kanturk and Millstreet community hospitals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36338/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond directly you in relation to this matter.

Home Help Service

846. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if the position of HSE home help has been changed to community home care assistants; when this commenced; the payments that should be paid to persons in a region (details supplied); the retrospective payments that were due; if all such retrospective payments have been made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36347/18]

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

Legislative Measures

847. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when Parts 2 and 3, sections 20 to 23, inclusive, of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015, will be commenced and resources provided to ensure these sections are fully operational on the ground; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36348/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Children and Family Relationships (Amendment) Bill 2018 was enacted on 24 July 2018. This Act was introduced to correct typographical and technical errors in the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015, which will facilitate the subsequent commencement of Parts 2 & 3 of the Act. It is intended that Parts 2 & 3 of the Act will be commenced in the autumn of 2018.

Sections 20-23 of the Act of 2015 make provisions for retrospective declarations of parentage provided specific conditions are met. Once these conditions are satisfied the mother of the child and the intending parent may, jointly (in the District Court) or separately (in the Circuit Court), apply to the relevant Court to make a declaration under section 21 (District Court) or section 22 (Circuit Court) that the intending parent is a parent of the relevant child. Rules of Court to facilitate the operation of Part 2 of the Act have been approved by the Circuit Court Rules Committee and the District Court Rules Committee, respectively, for concurrence by the Minister for Justice and Equality on the commencement of that Part.

Psychological Assessments

848. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment for a psychology assessment in Nenagh, County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36356/18]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

849. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be called for an appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36357/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Ser-

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

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

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

Tender Process

850. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding a tender; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36365/18]

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.

Respite Care Services Provision

851. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when respite care will be provided to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36371/18]

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

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

As the Deputy's question relates 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.

Health Services Provision

852. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when approval will be given to a person (details supplied) to attend a specialist; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36375/18]

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.

Medical Products

853. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health when funds will be available for a person (details supplied) to receive a mobility scooter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36376/18]

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.

Respite Care Services Data

854. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the number of hours of respite care provided at a facility (details supplied) in County Donegal each week to date in 2018; the number of service users these hours were delivered to for each of these weeks in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36380/18]

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

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

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

Departmental Communications

855. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the position in his Department and the organisations under its aegis that have arrangements in place for lo-call numbers or 1800, 1850 and 1890 phone numbers for members of the public to contact them; the number of these numbers that are completely free to call to persons who use mobile phones and may incur major bills phoning such organisations; if the situation will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36401/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In response to the Deputy's question, my Department has one 1890 number which is available to any member of the public who needs or wishes to contact the Department. We also offer our landline and email address for the public as an alternative to Lo-Call numbers. Lo-Call numbers were introduced before there was major competition in the telephone market in Ireland. Initially a call to a 1890 number would have cost the same as calling a local number. Now calls to 1890 numbers can vary widely – from 5c per minute to 45c per minute on some mobiles.

I have also forwarded your question to the HSE for direct reply. Details for other bodies under the aegis of the Department are operational matters for the bodies concerned.

Respite Care Services Data

856. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the budget per CHO area for emergency respite bed applications for 2017 and 2018; the allocations by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36414/18]

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

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

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

Health Services Provision

857. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if the decision to disband a service (details supplied) in County Cork will be reviewed. [36415/18]

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

Health Services Staff Data

858. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of HSE staff employed in each laboratory for the analysis of biochemistry and haematology blood tests in each of the years 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36422/18]

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

Question No. 859 answered with Question No. 662.

National Dementia Strategy

860. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health if an investment of €12 million will be included in budget 2019 towards community supports for persons with dementia (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36429/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The National Dementia Strategy was launched in December 2014 to meet the challenges faced by the 55,000 people living with dementia in Ireland and to provide services to meet growing demand in future years. The Strategy contains 35 priority and additional actions and its implementation is being led by

the National Dementia Office in the HSE. The office has made substantial progress towards developing evidence-based care pathways for people with dementia and progress to date, as well as future plans, are recorded in the mid-term review of the Strategy's implementation, which was published in May this year.

In 2016 and 2017, the National Dementia Office partnered with the Alzheimer Society of Ireland on a project to map dementia-specific community-based services and supports. It provides a useful snapshot and baseline study into what, where and when dementia services are being offered. The study has also been used to inform a service finder hosted on the National Dementia Office's website. This allows people to search for dementia-specific community services in their area. There are gaps in access to services and a large variance in what services are provided across the country. The National Dementia Office has met with senior HSE officials in each Community Healthcare Organisation region to highlight gaps in each area and to develop local action plans to improve service provision.

The National Dementia Strategy calls for the HSE to consider the provision of dementia advisers, based on the experience of demonstrator sites. In order to fully capture the experience of demonstrator sites and inform the future development of this service, the National Dementia Office commissioned an external evaluation of the service. The evaluation, by University College Cork, began in November 2017 and is expected to be finalised by September 2018. Initial results indicate that a majority of people with dementia are satisfied with the information, advice, support and signposting provided by dementia advisers. The service has brought normality to their lives, provided understanding about dementia and given people with dementia the confidence to ask questions. The appointment of additional dementia advisers will be considered when the results of this evaluation are available.

A priority action in the National Dementia Strategy is the appointment of key workers to coordinate each patient's care and promote continuity, and ensure that the patient knows who to access for information and advice. It is proposed that the key worker will be responsible for the coordinated planning and delivery of individually tailored care plans, developed in consultation with the person, their family carers and a range of health and social care practitioners. The key worker will also provide expert knowledge and leadership in dementia.

The Department of Health has secured funding through the 2018 Dormant Accounts Action Plan to continue funding in 2019 for the Dementia Community Activation Coordinator post which has been co-funded through a partnership between the Alzheimer Society of Ireland and the HSE during 2018. The Community Activation Coordinator is working with national organisations and key community stakeholders to support community dementia champions across Ireland. The Coordinator will seek to grow the number of champions and people within communities to take action to create sustainable dementia inclusive communities.

In terms of the specific requests for funding set out in the ASI pre-budget submission, the level of funding available for the Department of Health in 2019 and the quantum of services to be provided by the HSE will be considered as part of the national Estimates and budgetary process and National Service Planning.

Question No. 861 answered with Question No. 662.

HSE Properties

862. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the annual rental cost of buildings rented by his Department or organisations under its aegis at a location (details supplied); and if

he will make a statement on the matter. [36434/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the management of the healthcare property estate, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to you in relation to this matter.

Health Services

863. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the waiting period for persons to be given a replacement guide dog in circumstances in which their guide dogs are retired; and the procedure in such cases. [36437/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): This matter does not fall within my remit as Minister. I would suggest to the Deputy that he contact The Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind regarding his request.

National Dementia Strategy

864. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the community supports for persons with dementia here; his plans to expand the support levels for persons with dementia; his further plans to meet dementia advocacy groups to discuss increases in funding in the context of budget 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36449/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The National Dementia Strategy was launched in December 2014 to meet the challenges faced by the 55,000 people living with dementia in Ireland and to provide services to meet growing demand in future years. The Strategy contains 35 priority and additional actions and its implementation is being led by the National Dementia Office in the HSE. The office has made substantial progress towards developing evidence-based care pathways for people with dementia and progress to date, as well as future plans, is recorded in the mid-term review of the Strategy's implementation, which was published in May this year. The Strategy emphasises the need for a "whole community response" to dementia, as the majority of people with dementia live in their own communities and wish to avail of services in their local area.

In 2016 and 2017, the National Dementia Office partnered with the Alzheimer Society of Ireland on a project to map dementia-specific community-based services and supports. The project showed that the average number of community-based services in each Community Health Organisation was 35. Services provided in the community include dementia day care centres, a large proportion of which operate five days a week; dementia-specific homecare delivered by fully trained staff who are familiar with and understand the different symptoms and stages of dementia; dementia-friendly activities such as choirs and art gallery visits; dementia social clubs and Alzheimer Cafés; carer support groups; and dementia advisers. These services are provided by voluntary organisations and the HSE and partner organisations.

It is acknowledged that there are gaps in access to services and a large variance in what services are provided across the country. The National Dementia Office has met with senior HSE officials in each Community Healthcare Organisation region to highlight gaps in each area and to develop local action plans to improve service provision.

In addition to these community supports, in 2014 the HSE introduced Dementia-Specific Intensive Homecare Packages (Dementia-IHCPs) to test the feasibility of providing a high level

of support to people with dementia with complex needs to facilitate them to remain living at home. These were initially co-funded by the HSE and the Atlantic Philanthropies and now fully funded by the HSE, which has committed to continue to provide approximately 120 packages at any one time. In addition to the IHCPs, people with dementia are also able to avail of standard home care services on the basis of need and within the resources available

The Department of Health secured €6.26 million through the 2016, 2017 and 2018 Dormant Accounts Fund Action Plans to develop a number of projects which are designed to expand public awareness of dementia and to improve care for people with dementia. Projects receiving funding include the delivery of post-diagnostic supports; a dementia diagnostic service for people with intellectual disability; a national network of memory technology resource rooms; the development of a national dementia registry; the national rollout of a Dementia Training Programme for HSE homecare staff; the development of Dementia Resource Centres; funding for a dementia community activation coordinator; and community support projects for people with dementia.

In terms of plans to expand support levels for people with dementia, the level of funding available for the Department of Health in 2019 and the quantum of services to be provided by the HSE will be considered as part of the national Estimates and budgetary process and National Service Planning.

In July, I met with the Alzheimer Society of Ireland and discussed dementia issues, and have offered to meet with them again soon. I have also met Senator Colette Kelleher, a former CEO and advocate of the ASI, to specifically discuss the needs of people with dementia. I remain willing to engage with advocacy groups on dementia issues, and am committed to maintaining the warm relationships the Department has with them as we continue to work towards the greater provision of services and care to people with dementia, their carers and families.

Audiology Services Provision

865. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Health if a person's (details supplied) audiology consultation can be moved to Dublin in view of the fact that no audiologist is available in the person's home county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36453/18]

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.

HSE Staff Recruitment

866. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if, and when, interviews were held by the HSE at University Hospital Limerick for the post of acting or temporary CEO; and if the post was advertised internally within the HSE or through publicjobs.ie. [36457/18]

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

HSE Staff

867. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if the CEO at University Hospital Limerick has retained a post within the Saolta group; and if he will make a statement on the

matter. [36458/18]

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

Mental Health Services

868. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he will request an urgent and immediate review of the case file of a mental health patient (details supplied) where affirmative action needs to be taken in the person's care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36468/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The Mental Health Act 2001 sets out the formal procedures that must be followed to lawfully admit a person to a psychiatric hospital or unit as an involuntary patient. The Act also provides the necessary safeguards to protect the rights of such patients, as admissions on this basis proceed regardless of whether the patient consents to admission or not.

The process of involuntary detention under the Mental Health Act is a three-step process. The first step requires an applicant who has concerns about the mental health and welfare of the person to make an application for the person to be involuntarily admitted.

The second step requires that the person be examined and reviewed by a General Practitioner. Where the General Practitioner is of the view that the person is suffering from a mental disorder and would benefit from a period of treatment in hospital, or if there is a risk of harm by that person to themselves or others, he/she would then make a recommendation that the person concerned be involuntarily admitted to hospital.

The third step requires a consultant psychiatrist on duty to examine and review the person who is the subject of the application. If the psychiatrist, following an assessment agrees that clinically the person satisfies the criteria for detention and requires an in-patient admission under the Act, he/she will sign an admission order.

It is important to note that an application for an involuntary admission is ultimately a clinical decision as to whether the individual meets the criteria for detention. Therefore, 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 as a matter of urgency to the Deputy.

Health Services

869. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when an item will be provided to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36473/18]

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

Health Services

870. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if a process in the case of a person (details supplied) will be expedited by the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the

matter. [36483/18]

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.

Question No. 871 answered with Question No. 657.

Orthodontic Services Provision

872. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive braces. [36498/18]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

873. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the number of children awaiting an outpatient appointment in the three Dublin children's hospitals for more than 18 months has risen (details supplied); the actions he will take to address the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36518/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I acknowledge that Outpatient waiting times are often unacceptably long and I am conscious of the burden that this places on patients and their families. Reducing waiting times for hospital procedures is a key priority of this Government.

The latest NTPF figures show that 61% of patients on the Children's Hospital Group (CHG) Outpatient Waiting list are waiting 12 months or less and 69% of patients are waiting 15 months or less.

The CHG advises that there has been a major investment in additional consultant posts this year to reduce waiting times including orthopaedics and cardiology. As part of the national model of care for children an additional 12 Consultant posts are being recruited in three specialities, namely General Paediatrics (4 posts), Paediatric Emergency Medicine (6 posts) and Paediatric Radiology (2 posts). These consultant posts will join the cross-city department/s of Paediatric Emergency Medicine (PEM), General Paediatrics and Paediatric Radiology to support the delivery of care at the existing children's hospitals; Our Lady's Children's Hospital Group, Temple Street Children's University Hospital, the National Children's Hospital, Tallaght University Hospital and at the Paediatric Outpatients and Urgent Care Centre at Connolly upon opening in 2019.

In addition, the planned new national children's hospital will in time expand the physical capacity needed to increase activity and reduce waiting times in all paediatric services to help tackle current and future challenges in child health.

The CHG advises that the challenge for the children's hospitals is the volume of patients referred to the three hospitals and the Consultant capacity to deliver the service. The children's hospital have and continue to work with specialists to reduce waiting lists. The National Model of Care aims to deliver a hub and spoke model of care by providing treatment as near to the child's home as possible depending on their clinical needs.

Earlier this year, I approved the establishment of a Central Waiting List Validation function in the NTPF. The new office will consolidate and centralise validation activity for all Inpatient / Daycase and Outpatient waiting lists, thus ensuring a standardisation of approach across all waiting lists and all hospitals.

HSE Staff Recruitment

874. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the progress made to date in appointing a new director general for the HSE and the re-appointment of its board; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36519/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The recruitment competition for the appointment of a Director General to the Health Service Executive is in process. The competition is being managed by the Public Appointments Service (PAS). The post was advertised on Friday 22 June 2018 with a closing date of Thursday 9 August 2018. It is expected that an appointment will be announced by year end.

The PAS has concluded the process for recruitment of a Chairperson of the Board of the Health Service Executive and has sent its report to me. A decision on the successful candidate is imminent. A PAS campaign to identify 8 ordinary members of the Board, one of whom will be nominated as Deputy Chairperson, will commence in the coming weeks. This campaign will seek to identify persons with the appropriate skills and expertise to support the Chairperson in giving strong leadership to the HSE in delivering safe effective health and social care services and in guiding the HSE through a challenging programme of change.

Disease Incidence

875. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the number of cases of measles reported in each of the years from 2015 to 2017 and to date in 2018; the steps that have been taken to reduce and contain the spread of measles; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36520/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE - Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) is Ireland's specialist agency for the surveillance of communicable diseases. Measles has been a notifiable disease in Ireland since 1948.

As the Deputy's question relates to a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply.

Drug and Alcohol Task Forces

876. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE consulted with drug task forces regarding the provision of €710,000 funding for priority projects and services in CHO areas to address drug and alcohol misuse; the projects and funding being supported under this initiative; if these projects will be supported beyond this initial funding period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36521/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): In June 2018, I announced funding of €1 million for the enhancement of addiction services. The funding will be allocated in two parts:

- €290,00 via local and regional drug and alcohol task forces.

- €710,000 via the Health Service Executive, in consultation with local and regional drug and alcohol task forces.

The allocation of €710,000, referred to by the Deputy, will be used to enhance and expand the delivery of addiction treatment services, with a strategic focus on young people, dual diagnosis, service user involvement, and older people.

The funding will be administered by the nine community healthcare organisations (CHO) in the HSE. The addiction service manager in the CHO will agree on a list of priority projects and services for additional once-off funding following collective consultation with the task forces on their recommendations for funding in the area. Every CHO will be allocated in the region of €79,000 under this funding initiative.

The timeframe for allocating and spending these additional resources is quite limited. The proposals must be agreed in September, the funding allocated in October and the resources spent by the end of 2018. The critical issue is to ensure that all the resources provided in Budget 2018 are used to enhance drug addiction services.

I understand that the consultation process is currently underway. The list of projects funded under this allocation will be announced in due course.

Funding for these projects beyond 2018 will be considered in the context of the 2019 Estimates and Budget.

Health Services Staff Data

877. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of approved child psychiatrist posts in County Wexford; the number recommended for the county under A Vision for Change; the number vacant; the location of such vacancies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36542/18]

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

878. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36549/18]

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

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for sched-

uled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Health Services Provision

879. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the HSE's decision to cease respite services at a location (details supplied); if his attention has been drawn to the fact that this is the only centre providing this type of care in the town; the services taking its place; the reason this new service has been introduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36552/18]

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

Hospitals Data

880. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on hospital trolleys in all hospitals in the Dublin north east region, including Cavan and Monaghan Hospital, in each month since 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36553/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Minister fully acknowledges the distress for patients and their families, caused by overcrowded conditions in some of our hospital EDs and is committed to tackling overcrowding in EDs, which impacts on patients and staff working on the frontline.

This year has been characterised by high demand for unscheduled care, particularly in the over-75 age group. By the end of July 2018, total attendances were up 3.5% and admissions up 1.6%, compared to the same period in 2017. For those over 75, in the first 7 months of the year, attendances rose by 5.6% and admissions by 5.2%, compared to the same period in 2017. This increased level of demand was further exacerbated by the severe weather associated with Storm Emma earlier this year.

This growth in demand is well ahead of population growth and reflects international evidence that emergency department demand is driven by more than demographic factors.

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

Respite Care Services Data

881. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the number of respite beds available in counties Cavan and Monaghan; the facilities in which they are located; the number of beds available in each; if they are full as at 31 August 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36554/18]

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

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

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

Respite Care Services Data

882. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the number of respite beds available in counties Cavan and Monaghan in the past ten years, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36555/18]

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

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

As the Deputy's question relates 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 Staff Recruitment

883. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health when sonographers will be in place to provide anomaly scans at Cavan General Hospital; the timeline for the scan at the hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36562/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Maternity Strategy is very clear that all women must have equal access to standardised ultrasound services. The Strategy is being implemented on a phased basis and this work is being led by the National Women and Infants Health Programme. The Programme's Implementation Plan for the Strategy includes a number of actions to facilitate the provision by all maternity hospitals/units of dating and anomaly scans to all pregnant women.

Furthermore, additional development funding of €4.15 million is being allocated to maternity services this year. The Programme has prioritised improving quality and safety, establishing community midwifery teams and increasing access to anomaly scans. I understand that the Programme has approved the appointment of an additional 28 ultrasonographers which was the total requirement identified to provide 100% access to anomaly scanning.

Pending the completion of the requisite recruitment and training processes, I am assured that the Programme will continue to work with the six Hospital Groups to assist in increasing access to anomaly scans for those units with limited availability. The Programme is also working with the Maternity Networks to ensure foetal medicine expertise is available when an anomaly is identified. In relation to Cavan General Hospital specifically, I have asked the HSE to reply to you directly.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Provision

884. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of children aged zero to 18 years of age on waiting lists for an assessment with their local child and adolescent mental health team; the length of time they have been waiting by community healthcare organisation area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36563/18]

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.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Provision

885. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of children aged 0 to 18 years of age on waiting lists for initial and follow-up treatment with their local child and adolescent mental health team; the length of time they have been waiting by community healthcare organisation area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36564/18]

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

Psychological Assessments Waiting Times

886. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of children aged 0 to 18 years of age on waiting lists for an assessment with the primary care psychology service; the length of time they have been waiting by community healthcare organisation area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36565/18]

887. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of children aged 0 to 18 years of age on waiting lists for initial and follow-up treatment with the primary care psychology service; the length of time they have been waiting by community healthcare organisation area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36566/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 886 and 887 together.

As these question(s) relate to service matters, I have arranged for them to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

Speech and Language Therapy Waiting Lists

888. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of children 0 to 18 years of age on waiting lists for a speech and language assessment; the length of time they have been waiting by HSE community healthcare organisation area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36567/18]

889. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of children 0 to 18 years of age on waiting lists for initial and follow-up speech and language treatment; the length of time they have been waiting by HSE community healthcare organisation area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36568/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 888 and 889 together.

As these question(s) relate to service matters, I have arranged for them to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

Speech and Language Therapy Staff

890. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of whole-time equivalent speech and language therapists employed by the Health Service Executive; the number of whole-time equivalent vacancies by community healthcare organisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36569/18]

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

Disabilities Assessments

891. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of children 0 to 18 years of age on waiting lists for an initial assessment of need from early intervention teams; the length of time they have been waiting by HSE community healthcare organisation area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36570/18]

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.

Community Care

892. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the allocation of the ten new advance nurse practitioner posts by community healthcare organisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36572/18]

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.

Community Care

893. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the allocation of the 114 new assistant psychologist appointments by community healthcare organisation; the number that are in post; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36573/18]

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.

Community Care

894. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the allocation of the 20 new psychologist appointments by community healthcare organisation; the number that are in post; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36574/18]

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

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Staff

895. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the number of vacant posts in whole-time equivalent terms in the child and adolescent mental health services, CAMHS, for each CHO in tabular form. [36577/18]

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.

Question No. 896 answered with Question No. 798.

Hospital Facilities

897. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health the status of the consultation on the Midland Regional Hospital, Portlaoise; the progress made to date; the expected completion date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36611/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am committed to securing and further developing the role of the Midland Regional Hospital Portlaoise as a constituent hospital within the Dublin Midlands Hospital Group. Since 2014, the focus has been on supporting the hospital and significant work has been undertaken to strengthen and stabilise current arrangements for services at the hospital.

As the Deputy will be aware I have agreed on a consultation process on services at the Midlands Regional Hospital Portlaoise. An external facilitator is to be appointed and the consulta-

tion will include opportunities for engagement with stakeholders and interest groups.

Further details on the consultation arrangements will be available in the coming weeks.

Hospital Facilities

898. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health the progress made on the new building for St. Vincent's Hospital, Mountmellick, County Laois; and the expected timeline for the project. [36612/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond directly you in relation to this matter.

Medical Card Delays

899. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health if additional personnel and resources will be allocated in respect of the processing of medical card applications due to delays in relation to same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36616/18]

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

Drugs Payment Scheme

900. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health if a review of the operation of the FreeStyle Libre reimbursement scheme for children and young adults will be arranged with a view to making FreeStyle Libre available on the long term illness scheme for adults; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36617/18]

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.

Hospital Facilities

901. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health the position from the HSE estates department on the provision a new paediatric diabetes centre that is to be developed at Sligo University Hospital; when funding for the centre will be forthcoming; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36618/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly in relation to this matter.

Prescriptions Charges

902. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 1810 of 24 July 2018, and in view of the fact no response has issued from the HSE, the full year cost of reducing prescription charges to €1; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36619/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have been advised by the HSE that a response to question no. 1810 of 24 July 2018 was issued to the Deputy on 26 July.

Prescriptions Charges

903. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the full year cost of abolishing the prescription charge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36620/18]

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.

Hospital Consultant Recruitment

904. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 1814 of 24 July 2018, and in view of the fact no response has issued from the HSE, the full year cost of hiring 500 new consultants. [36621/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has provided me with a copy of the response to PQ 35052 (Dail Ref 1814), which issued to the Deputy on the 23rd of July. I attach a copy to this response for his information.

Drugs Payment Scheme Threshold

905. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 1811 of 24 July 2018 and in view of the fact that a response has not issued from the HSE, the full-year cost of reducing the DPS threshold to €50, €100 and €132, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36622/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have been advised by the HSE that a response to Question No. 1811 of 24 July 2018 was issued to the Deputy on 26 July.

General Practitioner Services Provision

906. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the full-year cost of providing universal general practitioner care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36623/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): GMS contractors receive a range of capitation rates, fee per service payments and practice supports and it is not possible to definitively calculate the cost of universal GP access given the wide range of payments and variables that have to be accounted for.

Such a calculation would require a complex and detailed modelling exercise to account for a range of demographic changes, future projections of service demands and variation in the number of GPs and the allowances that could be paid.

The Deputy will be aware that the Report of the Committee on the Future of Healthcare was published in May 2017 and recommended the phased introduction of universal GP care over the next five years through increased income thresholds.

The research carried out for that paper estimated the cost of this approach at €91 million per year for five years for a total additional annual cost of €455m. However, these figures have not been verified by my Department and, given the time that has elapsed since the research was conducted and the assumptions upon which it is based, they could underestimate the actual cost of the proposal.

Primary Care Services Provision

907. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the full-year cost of providing universal primary care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36624/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Government approved the Sláintecare Implementation Strategy in July 2018, which provides the framework within which a system-wide reform programme will be advanced. It sets out four overarching goals and ten high-level strategic actions which will be the key focus for the first three years of the reform programme.

Key actions in the first three years of reform in primary/community care include the development of a plan for the organisation and operation of community-based services based on population need and size. At this stage, it is not possible to definitively calculate the cost of universal primary care given the wide range of services, including nursing, multiple therapies, homecare packages and many others which are encompassed under primary care services. Such a calculation would require a complex and detailed modelling exercise to account for a range of demographic changes and future projections of service demands.

Question No. 908 answered with Question No. 662.

Treatment Abroad Scheme

909. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health if the treatment abroad scheme will be fully available to all women who have immediate medical issues regarding transvaginal mesh implant devices; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36626/18]

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

Medical Aids and Appliances Applications

910. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Clare will have a consultation to be assessed for a hearing aid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36630/18]

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

ferred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Status

911. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health when an appointment will be scheduled for a person (details supplied). [36639/18]

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

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

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

Patient Transfers

912. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be transferred to St. James's Hospital, Dublin, from Letterkenny University Hospital, County Donegal, for specialist treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36640/18]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

913. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36643/18]

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

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

are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Mental Health Services Provision

914. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of local health organisations that do not provide seven-over-seven mental healthcare for adults; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36646/18]

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

Home Help Service Provision

915. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health when home help hours will be provided to a person (details supplied). [36648/18]

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

Medical Aids and Appliances Applications

916. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an assessment for a person (details supplied) for a wheelchair; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36649/18]

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.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

917. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the reason asthma is not included under the long-term illness scheme in view of the fact it is a lifelong illness. [36652/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The LTI Scheme was established under Section 59(3) of the Health Act 1970 (as amended). The conditions covered by the LTI are: acute leukaemia; mental handicap; cerebral palsy; mental illness (in a person under 16); cystic fibrosis; multiple sclerosis; diabetes insipidus; muscular dystrophies; diabetes mellitus; parkinsonism; epilepsy; phenylketonuria; haemophilia; spina bifida; hydrocephalus; and conditions arising from the use of Thalidomide. Under the LTI Scheme, patients receive drugs, medicines, and medical and surgical appliances directly related to the treatment of their illness, free of charge.

There are no plans to extend the list of conditions covered by the Scheme.

Primary Care Centres

918. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health the status of the progress on the primary care centre for Thurles, County Tipperary; the chronology by each stage in the process since it started and to date; if there are time penalties; the measures which can be taken by the HSE in the event of the developer not progressing the project in a timely manner; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36660/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy in relation to this matter.

Medical Card Applications

919. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health the reason a medical card application by a person (details supplied) was closed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36663/18]

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

Medical Card Applications

920. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health the reason a medical card application by a person (details supplied) was closed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36664/18]

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

Medical Card Eligibility

921. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to introduce measures to award a medical card to persons who have had a spinal injury on the basis of need rather than means in view of the effect such an injury has on a person's life; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36685/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In accordance with the provisions of the Health Act 1970 (as amended), eligibility for a medical card is determined by the HSE. 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 that 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.

Hospital Waiting Lists

922. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36686/18]

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

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

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

Emergency Departments Waiting Times

923. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health the measures that will be taken to address the problems of overcrowding in the emergency department of University Hospital Limerick in view of the fact that it consistently tops the list of the hospitals with the most persons awaiting beds in the country; when a decision will be made on the provision and staffing of a 60-bed modular unit to provide extra beds in the hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36717/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In the light of the Health Service Capacity Review, which recommends that the system will need nearly 2,600 additional acute hospital beds by 2031, I have asked my Department to work with the HSE to identify the location and mix of beds which could be frontloaded in 2018 and into 2019 and 2020 to alleviate overcrowding in our hospital Emergency Departments.

My Department has received proposals from the HSE, which identify in the region of 600 additional acute beds and 270 additional residential care beds to be phased in between 2018 and 2020. These proposals are being considered by my Department and I can confirm that the proposals include the provision of a 60-bed modular unit in University Hospital Limerick.

Hospital Appointments Status

924. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36727/18]

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

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

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

Hospital Staff Recruitment

925. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the length of time a secretarial position has remained vacant in the dentistry department of Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin; when this position will be filled; the steps that will be taken to address the backlog of work resulting from this vacancy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36728/18]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

926. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) can expect to receive a referral letter from the dentistry department of Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin; the timeframe for the person's treatment under the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36729/18]

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

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

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

Primary Care Centres Provision

927. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 65 of 3 May 2017, if the ecology assessment of the identified site has been completed; the progress to date on the provision of a new health centre for Inisbofin, County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36733/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly in relation to this matter.

Home Help Service Provision

928. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if persons (details supplied) will be assessed in respect of the provision of home help. [36735/18]

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

Home Help Service

929. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the reason the new contracts for home helps are not being implemented in Tralee, County Kerry (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36736/18]

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.

Question No. 930 answered with Question No. 651.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

931. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if the inclusion of a specific illness (details supplied) in the long-term illness card scheme will be reconsidered. [36767/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The LTI Scheme was established under Section 59(3) of the Health Act 1970 (as amended). The conditions covered by the LTI are: acute leukaemia; mental handicap; cerebral palsy; mental illness (in a person under 16); cystic fibrosis; multiple sclerosis; diabetes insipidus; muscular dystrophies; diabetes mellitus; parkinsonism; epilepsy; phenylketonuria; haemophilia; spina bifida; hydrocephalus; and conditions arising from the use of Thalidomide. Under the LTI Scheme, patients receive drugs, medicines, and medical and surgical appliances directly related to the treatment of their illness, free of charge.

There are no plans to extend the list of conditions covered by the Scheme.

Hospital Waiting Lists

932. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for surgery for a person (details supplied). [36776/18]

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

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

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

Medical Card Drugs Availability

933. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if immunotherapy drugs, pembrolizumab or nivolumab, will be made available on the medical card to persons with late stage cancers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36779/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for medicine pricing and reimbursement decisions, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. The HSE applies the same process on an administrative basis to the assessment of hospital medicines.

As Minister for Health, I do not have any statutory power or functions in relation to the reimbursement of medicines.

Immunotherapy drugs such as pembrolizumab and nivolumab are administered in a hospital setting only and all persons ordinarily resident in Ireland are eligible for hospital services as public patients.

Pembrolizumab is currently reimbursed for the following indications:

- as monotherapy for the treatment of advanced (unresectable or metastatic) melanoma in adults.

- as monotherapy for the first-line treatment of metastatic non-small cell lung carcinoma (NSCLC) in adults whose tumours express PD-L1 with a $\geq 50\%$ tumour proportion score (TPS) with no EGFR or ALK positive tumour mutations.

The HSE is currently deliberating on the reimbursement of pembrolizumab for the following indications:

- as a monotherapy for the treatment of adult patients with relapsed or refractory classical Hodgkin lymphoma who have failed autologous stem cell transplant and brentuximab vedotin (BV), or who are transplant-ineligible and have failed BV

- as a monotherapy for the treatment of locally advanced or metastatic NSCLC in adults whose tumours express PD-L1 with a $\geq 1\%$ TPS and who have received at least one prior chemotherapy regimen. Patients with EGFR or ALK positive tumour mutations should also have received targeted therapy before receiving Keytruda.

The HSE has commissioned the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics to conduct Health Technology Assessments in respect of the following indications:

- Pembrolizumab (Keytruda) for the first-line treatment of patients with locally advanced or metastatic urothelial carcinoma who are not eligible for cisplatin-containing chemotherapy.

- Pembrolizumab (Keytruda) as monotherapy for the treatment of locally advanced or metastatic urothelial carcinoma in adults who have received prior platinum-containing chemotherapy.

There are no other indications for pembrolizumab approved in the European Union at this time.

Nivolumab is currently reimbursed for the following indications:

- as a monotherapy treatment for patients diagnosed with unresectable metastatic melanoma.

- for the treatment of relapsed or refractory classical Hodgkin lymphoma after autologous stem cell transplant and treatment with brentuximab vedotin

- for the treatment of advanced renal cell carcinoma after prior therapy in adults.

- for the treatment of squamous cell carcinoma of the head and neck (SCCHN) in adults progressing on or after platinum-based therapy.

- Nivolumab (Opdivo) plus ipilimumab (Yervoy) for the treatment of advanced melanoma.

The HSE approved nivolumab for reimbursement from 03 September 2018, as a new option for the treatment of locally advanced or metastatic NSCLC after previous chemotherapy in adults.

The HSE is currently deliberating on the reimbursement of nivolumab for the following indications:

- 2nd line use in locally advanced unresectable or metastatic urothelial carcinoma.

- Adjuvant melanoma.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

934. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if the delivery of equipment to a person (details supplied) in County Cork will be expedited. [36783/18]

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.

Hospitals Capital Programme

935. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the status of funding for the pro-

posed new renal unit for Tallaght University Hospital; his plans to ensure the funding is forthcoming in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36793/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly in relation to this matter.

Home Care Packages Data

936. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of home support packages that have been granted in the CHO7 area dealing with south-western areas of Dublin in the past year; the number of applications in this regard; the allocated budget for home support packages in the CHO7 area in the past year; the waiting time for home support packages in this area; his plans to increase funding for home support packages in the CHO7 area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36794/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As the statistical information sought by the Deputy relating to Home Support Services in the CHO 7 area is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy on those matters as soon as possible.

Additional funding will be considered in context of the Estimate process.

Emergency Departments Waiting Times

937. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the average number of persons waiting on trolleys in Tallaght University Hospital in July 2018 and August 2018 and the number for July 2017 and August 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36795/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I fully acknowledge the distress for patients and their families caused by overcrowded conditions in some of our hospital Emergency Departments (EDs) and am committed to tackling overcrowding in EDs, which impacts on patients and staff working on the front line.

In view of the current pressures on the hospital system, which particularly impact on EDs and the recommendations of the Health System Capacity Review, I have asked the HSE to identify the location and mix of beds across the hospital system which can be opened in 2018 and into 2019 and 2020 to alleviate overcrowding in our hospital EDs and improve preparedness for Winter 2018/2019.

The Department has received proposals from the HSE, which identify an additional 600 acute beds and 270 residential care beds to be phased in between 2018 and 2020. These proposals are being considered.

Between January and July 2018, total attendances were up 3.5% and admissions up 1.6%, compared to the same period in 2017. For those over 75, attendances rose by 5.6% and admissions by 5.2%, compared to the same period in 2017.

Regarding the specific issue raised by the Deputy, there were a total of 578 patients recorded as waiting on trolleys at 8 a.m. in Tallaght University Hospital ED in July 2018, as compared with 280 in July 2017, an increase of 106%.

The daily average number of patients recorded as waiting on trolleys at 8 a.m. during July 2018 was about 19, as compared with a daily average of 9 in July 2017.

In relation to August 2017, there were 452 patients recorded as waiting on trolleys at 8 a.m., which equates to a daily average of about 15.

The figures for August 2018 are still being validated by the HSE and will be available on 13 September. I have asked my Department to update the Deputy when these figures are received.

Home Care Packages Data

938. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the details of the operation of home care services across all CHOs; the number of persons allocated a home care package who are still waiting to receive the care; if this is due to funding or lack of carers by CHO; the priority category of each applicant; the length of time they have been waiting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36837/18]

939. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the procedure for home care delivery in CHO area 6; the percentage of care delivered through private operators and through direct HSE employment, respectively; the rationale for which applicants receive which care; the length of time applicants are waiting for care; if this differs according to private or HSE delivery; the details of waiting lists; if there is a prioritisation process; if the waiting list is dependent on budget; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36838/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 938 and 939 together.

As these are service matters I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Home Care Packages Provision

940. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 1369 of 24 July 2018, the further length of time a person (details supplied) will be waiting to receive home care hours in view of the fact that the person is priority 1 and has been waiting since March 2018 for the care allocated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36839/18]

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

941. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the number of children across the country who are awaiting an assessment of need including an assessment for autism spectrum disorder by county or on an aggregate national basis in tabular form; the number waiting for greater than six months as set out in the Disability Act 2005; the number waiting by bands (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36840/18]

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

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

Disability Services Data

942. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the number of children across the country who are awaiting speech and language therapy, physiotherapy and occupational therapy by county or on an aggregate national basis, by each therapy; the waiting lists by service providers; the number waiting by bands (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36841/18]

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

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

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

943. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Cork was placed on the waiting list for autotics; the position of the person on the waiting list; when the person will be provided with the autotics; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36847/18]

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.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

944. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Cork was placed on the waiting list for a particular walker; the position of the person on the waiting list; when the person will be provided with the equipment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36848/18]

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

Health Services Provision

945. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health his plans to support the development of community based Parkinson's nurse specialists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36850/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): As this question relates to service matters, I have arranged for it to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

Hospital Staff

946. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if a sustainable solution has been found to restore full medical officer cover at a hospital (details supplied) in County Cork. [36851/18]

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

947. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the provision of a specific HSE service (details supplied) in County Cork in view of the significant importance of this service to the area. [36868/18]

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

Home Help Service

948. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health if additional funding will be allocated in respect of the home support scheme in counties Cavan and Monaghan in view of delays in putting in place such support from the time of initial approval; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36871/18]

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.

Question No. 949 answered with Question No. 562.

Abortion Services Provision

950. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health his plans to proceed with special

interim legislation in respect of parents with fatal foetal abnormalities as proposed by him; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36969/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I assume the Deputy is referring to regulating access to termination of pregnancy on the grounds of a fatal foetal condition.

As the Deputy will be aware, there is a court process ongoing in relation to the result of the Referendum on the Thirty-sixth Amendment of the Constitution, held on 25 May 2018. While this process is ongoing there are orders in place stalling the procedure to enact the constitutional amendment. This means that the referendum result 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 the legal termination of pregnancy cannot be published in the Houses of the Oireachtas, as article 40.3.3 remains unchanged in the Constitution.

However, as the Deputy will also be aware, the General Scheme of the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Bill 2018 was published in advance of the Referendum on the Thirty-sixth Amendment of the Constitution, and an Updated General Scheme was approved by Government on 10 July 2018 and published on my Department's website. Head 6 of the Updated General Scheme makes provision for access to termination on the grounds of a condition affecting the foetus that is likely to lead to the death of the foetus either before or within 28 days of birth.

It is my intention to bring the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Bill to Government as soon as possible. It is a priority for the Government to have a medically delivered, safe and regulated service for the termination of pregnancy for all those who require it in this State.

Brexit Issues

951. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health the policy of his Department in respect of drugs policy in the event of a hard Brexit that full access will be maintained to medical supplies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36988/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In co-ordination with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Department of Health and its agencies including the HSE and the HPRA are engaging in intensive Brexit preparedness and contingency planning in the area of health.

A number of issues are being examined and contingency planning for a range of eventualities is under way. One key issue will be to ensure that there is minimum disruption to health services and that essential services are maintained on a cross-Border, all-island and Ireland-UK basis.

Priorities include ensuring continuity in the supply of medicines/medical devices, ensuring access to services, manpower in our health services, recognition of qualifications, continuation of existing cross-Border health co-operation and public health arrangements.

This work is informing requirements and ensuring that we are prepared in all scenarios.

Farm Household Incomes

952. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine

his plans to address issues in regard to supporting farm incomes (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35755/18]

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

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

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

To date in 2018, €2.8 million approximately has been paid to just over 20,000 sheep farmers from the sheep welfare scheme. I also recently announced a doubling of the financial support to sheep farmers of support payments for compliance with new sheep EID rules of €100 per farmer.

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

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

As I outlined to the Joint Oireachtas Committee this week, I have also put in place a range of initiatives and supports aimed at reducing pressure on farmers in response to the current fodder shortages.

Rural Development Programme Funding

953. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to address issues regarding funding for farmers (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35756/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Ireland's Rural Development Programme 2014–2020 (RDP) represents a substantial investment, by both the EU and the National Exchequer, in the agrifood sector and in Irish farmers. The RDP is co-funded by the EU's European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) to a sum

of €2.19 billion over the programme lifespan. This EU funding is supplemented by Exchequer funding bringing the total allocation to €4 billion.

The latest review of the RDP confirmed that entire budget of some €4 billion is fully committed and is expected to be spent by the end of 2020, although there will be some carry-over into 2021. Under EU regulations governing the Rural Development Programme, funds for multi-annual commitments entered into by the end of 2020 may be claimed up to the end of 2023. The Review of Expenditure under the Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020 completed in June 2018 has been published on my Department's website and is available at the following link <https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/media/migration/ruralenvironment/ruraldevelopment/ruraldevelopmentprogramme2014-2020/ReviewRDPExpenditureJune050718.pdf> .

With regard to funding for the Areas facing Natural Constraints (ANC) scheme, the financial allocation for 2018 is €227 million, which includes €25 million in additional funding on foot of the Programme for Partnership Government commitment to increase ANC funding. Based on current projections, the projected total spend is expected to be almost €1.5 billion for ANC and the transitional schemes LFA/DAS over the duration of the RDP. The projected spend for GLAS and the transitional agri-environment measures is €1.4 billion over the duration of the RDP. As the RDP funding is fully committed and expected to be spent.

The €4 billion investment under the Rural Development Programme represents a substantial vote of confidence in Irish farming and in rural Ireland. My Department will continue to review the implementation of the Rural Development Programme to ensure that the RDP funding is fully spent and thereby providing a vital support to our farming community and rural Ireland. My Department will also ensure that all EU funding is fully drawn down and that all targets set down under the Rural Development Programme are met.

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

Invasive Plant Species

954. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to provide financial supports for farmers in County Wexford who must reseed their land upon the arrival of invasive species including Japanese knotweed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36602/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht is responsible for implementing the Wildlife Acts, the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 477/2011), and the 2014 EU Regulation on invasive alien species (No. 1143/2014) which together provide the legislative framework on invasive alien species issues.

In law, control of invasive species such as Japanese Knotweed is a matter in the first instance for landowners. The Good Agricultural & Environmental Condition (GAEC) 7 (Retention of Landscape Features & Designated Habitats and Controlling Invasive Species) requires that noxious weeds and invasive species must be controlled on holdings.

There is no funding currently available from my Department for reseeding of lands as a

result of encroachment of invasive species such as Japanese knotweed.

Voluntary Homeowners Relocation Scheme

955. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of his plans for a voluntary farm building relocation scheme due to flooding issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36887/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Minister of State for the Office of Public Works and Flood Relief, last year announced the introduction of a once-off targeted Voluntary Homeowner Relocation Scheme. As part of the announcement the Minister outlined that a feasibility study would be undertaken in relation to a potential once-off targeted scheme for Voluntary Farm Building Relocation.

The study to determine the feasibility of any future once-off targeted scheme for Voluntary Farm Building Relocation is being undertaken. My Department has evaluated a range of at risk farmyards, impacted by flooding, to see if any alternative remedial works can be undertaken to protect farm buildings at risk of flooding and is currently considering this evaluation and feasibility of a future scheme.

Live Exports

956. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to a live animal export episode in Cork Harbour documented by a group (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35498/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I can confirm that I have received representations from the group referred to in your question.

The protection of animals during transport and related operations is legislated for by Council Regulation (EC) No 1/2005 and S.I. No. 675 of 2006 European Communities (Animal Transport and Control Post) Regulations 2006.

The protection of animals during transport on dedicated livestock vessels and Roll-On/Roll-Off vessels is legislated for by S.I. No. 356 of 2016 Carriage of Livestock by Sea Regulations 2016 and S.I. No. 580 of 2007 Diseases of Animals (Animal Transport) (Roll-On Roll-Off Vessels) Order 2007.

DAFM inspectors were present at all stages of the consigning of the livestock from assembly centre to arrival and penning on board the vessel.

DAFM inspectors ensured the correct procedures were applied at the various stages of assembly, loading and transport of the animals in question. It can also be stated that high animal welfare standards were maintained throughout the operation.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

957. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an agri-environment options scheme, AEOS, payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35520/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): A full review has been carried out by the Regional Inspector, based on the outcome of the Agriculture Appeals Office decision.

The person named will be informed in writing of the outcome of this review and any outstanding payments due as a result will issue shortly.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

958. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the case of a person (details supplied) with regard to a farm payment that is being penalised will be examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35561/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The recent reduction applied on the parcel in question arose as a result of standard eligibility checks carried out by my Department. As a follow up to this process, a field visit is to be carried out in order to establish the most up to date position. This process should be completed shortly, and the results will be communicated directly to the person named.

Control of Dogs

959. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the enforcement of the 2015 legislation to microchip dogs that is in place; the fines and penalties that have been imposed since the legislation came into force; the reason some pounds are still not microchipping dogs three years after the legislation was enacted; and the details of the new databases in view of concerns that the new database is not approved (details supplied). [35580/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The available evidence about numbers of dogs chipped indicates a very high level of compliance.

The focus of enforcement by authorised officers operating under the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013 has mainly been on the wholesale sector and dogs being exported. Legal cases have mainly been taken against owners of unchipped dogs where this has occurred in conjunction with other issues, in particular animal welfare offences.

Many of the dogs in dog pounds are unwanted dogs who have been abandoned by their owners and unfortunately such individuals may not have taken a responsible approach to ensuring their dog's traceability.

The operation of dog pounds and dog wardens remains the responsibility of Local Authorities. Many dog pounds have engaged with microchipping as they understand it is the most effective way to ensure smooth reunification and therefore I would encourage all Local Authorities to adopt best practice in this area.

The complaint raised in respect of an unapproved database is being investigated.

Aquaculture Licence Applications Data

960. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the details of communications in relation to aquaculture licences at a location (details supplied);

and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35605/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The very detailed information requested by the Deputy is not readily available in full. My Department's records are currently being examined and a full reply will issue to the Deputy by my Department as soon as possible

GLAS Payments

961. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a farm payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35691/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015 and has received payment for scheme year 2015 and the 2016 advance payment.

The participant was selected for a 2016 inspection and requested a review of the inspection findings. Additional documentation was submitted and examined by the inspector. The review has now been completed and a letter has issued directly to the person named.

Fur Farming

962. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans in relation to renewing fur farming licences when they next expire; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35784/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department has statutory responsibility for the welfare and protection of farmed animals under the European Communities (Welfare of Farmed Animals) Regulations, 2010 (Statutory Instrument No 311/2010) and the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013. Irish fur farmers are, in this regard, subject to the same animal welfare legislation as other livestock farmers.

A review of all aspects of fur farming in Ireland was commissioned in November 2011. The Terms of Reference of the Review Group were:

- (i) To review fur farming in Ireland taking into account existing legislative provisions for the licensing of mink farming;
- (ii) To comment on the economic benefits of the sector;
- (iii) To consider the effectiveness of existing welfare controls, and
- (iv) To make appropriate recommendations

The Review Group invited submissions from the public and interested parties and considered over four hundred submissions which were received.

The Group concluded that it did not find the arguments in favour of banning the farming of fur animals in Ireland compelling and recommended that instead, fur farming be allowed continue under licence and subject to official control.

On foot of the Review Group's deliberations, my Department introduced more rigorous

controls on licenceholders in the areas of animal welfare, animal accommodation, security and nutrient management. Licensees are subject to regular inspections, including unannounced inspections by Department officials.

Current licences will be subject to renewal provided the licenceholders comply with the regulations laid down by my Department.

Fish Quotas

963. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will address concerns that access to the fishing grounds of the porcupine prawn off the west coast of Ireland is being denied to Irish vessels; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35815/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The available quota for nephrops (prawns) for the Porcupine grounds for 2018 was 1773t comprising 992t original quota, swaps of 561t in 2018 and 230t from swaps carried out at the end of 2017 which was carried over into 2018. The reported landings of this stock was 1827t by the 23 July 2018. I closed this fishery on 24 July 2018 as the quota has been fully exhausted. My officials are endeavouring to secure a swop of Porcupine nephrops from another MS to address the landings in excess of available quota.

Fodder Crisis

964. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the measures he has taken to address the lack of fodder supply; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35816/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I would like to give the Deputy a full account of the actions and measures I have put in place over the short last while to meet the challenges in this sector. Following the fodder difficulties of last winter and spring I formed a representative group chaired by Teagasc, including stakeholders such as co-ops, banks, farm bodies, among others, to co-ordinate advisory messages to farmers this summer around replenishing depleted stocks of fodder. I have requested the group to co-ordinate advice on managing grazing and fodder conservation through this extended period of extraordinarily dry weather. Practical advice is being shared across the group on dealing both with the current weather and on filling the significant fodder gap.

On the 26th June last, I launched a national fodder survey to be compiled by Teagasc through its client network as well as clients of the other fodder group stakeholders, with another survey being conducted this week. Given the findings of this survey, the overall priority must be to conserve as much fodder for the coming winter as possible when the opportunity to do so arises.

I met with Commissioner Hogan on the 24th July last and briefed him on the impact on Irish Agriculture of the dry spell. I secured agreement from the Commissioner to pay higher advance payments this autumn. As a result, advances for Pillar 1 and 2 payments will be increased to 70% and 85%, respectively, resulting in €260 million in additional cashflow for farmers at a vital time of the year. I also proposed to Commissioner Hogan certain flexibilities for participants under the GLAS scheme which will replenish their fodder stocks for the winter period. In this connection I am pleased to have secured the agreement of the European Commission for these measures, which are now in place since 1st September and which together bring a potential ad-

ditional 270,000 hectares into fodder production.

Furthermore on the 3rd August I announced a €2.75 million Fodder Production Incentive for Tillage Farmers to encourage tillage growers to actively engage in the fodder market. This measure will provide an incentive of €155 per hectare for tillage growers who grow a temporary crop of short rotation grasses for fodder production over the winter months and €100 per hectare for those growing catch crops such as fodder rape, turnips and brassica crops. Currently over 23,000 hectares of catch crops are supported under the Agri-Environment Scheme, GLAS. This additional funding commitment aims to incentivise a doubling of this area. I am confident this measure will support Tillage farmers to supply into the market for fodder. Tillage farmers are a critical part of our agricultural sector, supplying the brewing and distilling industry, grain to the feed industry and straw to the livestock sector, while also delivering other benefits.

Also, following consultation in August with my Government colleague, the Minister for Planning, Housing and Local Government, Mr. Eoghan Murphy T.D., flexibility has been granted on an extension to the closed period for spreading of chemical and organic fertilisers in order to capitalise on autumn grass growth for fodder production. This extra two weeks granted by Minister Murphy will allow application up to the 30th September and 31st October, respectively, and again maximise the opportunity for autumn production.

On the 22nd August I announced a €4.25 million Fodder Import Support Measure for Autumn 2018. The measure seeks to reduce the cost to farmers of imported forage, that is: hay, silage, haylage, alfalfa and others from outside the island of Ireland. The measure will operate through the co-operatives/registered importers and will cover forage imported from 12th August 2018 to 31st December 2018 and will of course be subject to EU State Aid (*de-minimis*) rules. I wish to confirm that while the measure will operate through the co-operatives/registered importers, the actual beneficiaries will be farmers who need supplies of fodder.

I know that the range of measures introduced by me to date taken together and targeted at producing as much fodder as possible from our own land provide the most effective response to a fodder shortfall. I can also assure you that I will continue to closely monitor and engage on this significant challenge during this difficult period.

Farm Inspections

965. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of recent reports of bullying and harassment by departmental inspectors while carrying out on-farm inspections; the number of complaints that have been made concerning such bullying in each of the past four years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35817/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The data requested is set out in the table.

Year	Number of customer service complaints from farmers received by Quality Service Unit regarding inspections
2014	0
2015	1
2016	3
2017	1
2018 to date (01/01/2018 - 27/08/2018)	2

The data set out in the table relates to complaints from farmers received by the Quality Service Unit of my Department as part of my Department's Customer Service Complaints Procedure. It is important to note that this Customer Service Complaints Procedure concerns complaints regarding customer service; it does not cover requests for reviews or appeals against actual decisions taken in the operation of a scheme or service as these have a separate appeals process.

My Department is committed to providing a user-friendly, high quality service to all farmers. Where it is considered that my Department falls short of this, my Department's Customer Service Complaints Procedure can be availed of by farmers. Having regard to data protection obligations, specific detail in respect of the complaints referred to in the table above cannot be provided, but in general they involve dissatisfaction with aspects of inspections such as the alleged lack of notice, attitude and conduct of Department staff and methodologies employed.

All complaints received to date have been formally acknowledged and dealt with, or are in the process of being dealt with.

There are three possible steps in the customer service complaints process:

- Complaints should first be directed to the senior officer in charge of the business area within the Department to which the complaint pertains.

- If the complainant is dissatisfied with the response received from the Head of the relevant business area, the complaint can be sent to the Quality Service Unit who will examine any customer service aspect of the complaint. The Quality Service Unit will have the matter fully and impartially investigated by an officer who was not involved in the matter giving rise to the complaint.

- If the complainant remains dissatisfied after steps 1 and 2 above, it is open to the complainant to contact the Office of the Ombudsman. The Office of the Ombudsman examines complaints from people who feel they have been unfairly treated by certain public bodies, for example, Government Departments.

Aquaculture Licence Applications

966. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding a licensing issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35949/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department considers all applications for aquaculture licences in accordance with the provisions of the 1997 Fisheries (Amendment) Act, the 1933 Foreshore Act and applicable EU legislation. The licensing process involves consultation with a wide range of scientific and technical advisers as well as various Statutory Consultees. The legislation also provides for a period of public consultation.

In addition, the legislation governing aquaculture licensing provides for an appeals mechanism. Appeals against licence decisions are a matter for the Aquaculture Licences Appeals Board (ALAB) which is an independent statutory body. Full details of the appeals process can be obtained at <http://www.alab.ie/appealsprocess/>.

In accordance with the applicable legislation, the Statutory and Public Consultation phase in respect of these applications is now concluded. Every effort is being made to expedite a deci-

sion on these applications having regard to the complexities involved. As these licence applications are under active consideration as part of a statutory process it would not be appropriate to comment further on the matter at this time.

Fodder Crisis

967. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a series of matters raised in correspondence (details supplied) in relation to the fodder crisis will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35969/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I note the contents of your letter addressed to me from Monaghan County Council dated 10 April 2018 attached to your PQ and in this connection I would like to confirm that my office replied to this letter on the 16 April 2018 with the information current at the time.

Now, however I would like to give the Deputy a full account of the additional actions and measures I have put in place since that time to meet the challenges in this sector.

Following the fodder difficulties of last winter and spring I formed a representative group chaired by Teagasc, including stakeholders such as Co-ops, banks, farm bodies, amongst others, to coordinate advisory messages to farmers this Summer around replenishing depleted stocks of fodder. I have requested the group to co-ordinate advice on managing grazing and fodder conservation through this extended period of extraordinarily dry weather.

On the 26th June last I launched a national fodder survey to be compiled by Teagasc through its client network as well as clients of the other fodder group stakeholders, with another survey currently being undertaken with interim results expected to be available next week.

I met with Commissioner Hogan on the 24th July last and briefed him on the impact on Irish Agriculture of the dry spell. I have secured agreement from the Commissioner to pay higher advance payments this autumn. As a result, advances for Pillar 1 and 2 payments will be increased to 70% and 85% respectively, resulting in €260 million in additional cash flow for farmers at a vital time of the year. I proposed to Commissioner Hogan certain flexibilities for participants under the GLAS scheme which will replenish their fodder stocks for the winter period.

I am very pleased to have secured the agreement of the European Commission for these flexibilities which are now in place since 1st September and which together bring a potential additional 270,000 hectares into fodder production.

Furthermore on the 3rd August I announced a €2.75 million Fodder Production Incentive for Tillage Farmers to encourage tillage growers to actively engage in the fodder market. This measure will provide an incentive of €155 per hectare for tillage growers who grow a temporary crop of short rotation grasses for fodder production over the winter months and €100 per hectare for those growing catch crops such as fodder Rape, Turnips and Brassica crops. Currently over 23,000 hectares of catch crops are supported under the Agri-Environment Scheme, GLAS. This additional funding commitment aims to incentivise a doubling of this area. I am confident this measure will support Tillage farmers to supply into the market for fodder. Tillage farmers are a critical part of our agricultural sector, supplying the brewing and distilling industry, grain to the feed industry and straw to the livestock sector, whilst also delivering other benefits.

Also, following consultation in August with my Government colleague the Minister for Planning, Housing and Local Government Mr. Eoghan Murphy T.D., flexibility has been granted on an extension to the closed period for spreading of chemical and organic fertilisers in order

to capitalise on autumn grass growth for fodder production. This extra two weeks granted by Minister Murphy will allow application up to the 30th September and 31st October respectively and again maximise the opportunity for Autumn production.

On the 22nd August I announced a €4.25million Fodder Import Support Measure for Autumn 2018. The measure seeks to reduce the cost to farmers of imported forage, that is: hay silage, haylage, alfalfa and others from outside the island of Ireland. The measure will operate through the Co-operatives/registered importers and will cover forage imported from 12th August 2018 to 31st December 2018 and will of course be subject to EU State Aid (*de-minimis*) rules. I wish to confirm that while the measure will operate through the Co-operatives/registered importers, the actual beneficiaries will be farmers who need supplies of fodder.

I know that the range of measures introduced by me to-date taken together and targeted at producing as much fodder as possible from our own land provide the most effective response to a fodder shortfall. I can assure you that I will continue to closely monitor and engage on this significant challenge during this difficult period.

Young Farmer Capital Investment Scheme Applications

968. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a grant payment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork will be expedited. [35980/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The applicant in this case has applied under the Young Farmer Capital Investment Scheme of TAMS II. The application has passed the initial administrative checks and requires final technical checks before approval issues. This process is underway.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

969. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a farm payment for a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35985/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As the Deputy would be aware from previous recent PQ’s, a review by the Director of Agriculture Appeals Office of the decision of the Appeals Officer has been requested in this case in accordance with the provisions of the Agriculture Appeals Act, 2001. The Agriculture Appeals Office has indicated that requests for reviews are generally dealt with in order of receipt and that both the Department and the person named will be advised of the outcome when the review has been completed.

Aquaculture Licence Applications

970. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the full environmental impact study will be carried out on a bay; when a person (details supplied) will receive a decision on an application for an aquaculture licence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36002/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Depart-

ment has received a number of applications for Aquaculture Licences from the applicant referred to by the Deputy in respect of sites located within Ballyness Bay which is designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) under the EU Habitats Directive (Natura 2000 site).

All aquaculture activities in Natura site areas require an Appropriate Assessment to be carried out before any aquaculture licensing determinations can be made. My Department is working with the Marine Institute and the National Parks and Wildlife Service to achieve full compliance with the EU Birds and Habitats Directives through a multi-annual work programme. This data collection programme, which is substantially complete, together with the setting of Conservation Objectives, will enable all new and renewal aquaculture applications to be assessed.

Conservation Objectives have been set for Ballyness SAC. The next step in the process is the carrying out of an Appropriate Assessment by the Marine Institute. This is being progressed and it has been confirmed by the MI that the completion of the Appropriate Assessment is imminent. While the Appropriate Assessments are carried out on a bay by bay basis, each licence application within the bay must be assessed individually.

Addressing the issue of aquaculture licensing in Natura 2000 areas is a key priority for my Department and the Deputy can be assured that every effort is being made to expedite the completion of the process in Ballyness Bay having regard to all the complexities involved.

Pesticide Use

971. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 482 of 28 November 2017, his plans to review a decision to allow pre-harvest spraying of crops in 2016 with glyphosate products; if he has had engagement with the Department of Health or otherwise in the context of the sale of glyphosate in consumer stores in view of the court case in the US regarding a branded glyphosate product; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36015/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Regulatory decisions on the approval and use of pesticides are based on the scientific consensus view of all the relevant technical information from all sources. My Department is the Competent Authority in Ireland with responsibility for the authorisation of Plant Protection Products (PPPs).

Experts from a range of specialised scientific disciplines engage with scientific experts in other Member States, with other Competent Authorities, with EU regulatory bodies and also with experts in the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) in relation to the approval of Plant Protection Products. Information and opinions from other bodies would be carefully considered where relevant.

Regarding the use of plant protection products containing glyphosate in Ireland, I continue to be guided by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA), who have both concluded, on the basis of extensive reviews involving public consultation, that glyphosate can be used safely without putting consumers or users at risk. The EFSA review included an assessment of potential dietary exposure that could result from pre-harvest use.

My Department will continue to monitor international peer reviewed scientific evidence and the guidance provided by EFSA and ECHA.

Licence Applications

972. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a company (details supplied) was granted a licence to be an approved tree and hedging nursery; if so, the year it was granted and revoked; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36016/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The primary role of my Department is to ensure that the producers of plant material comply with both EU and Irish plant health legislation. The aim of this legislation is to prevent the movement and spread of plant quarantine harmful organisms within the EU territory and its member states.

To achieve this, an identification label called a 'plant passport' must accompany certain plants, which identifies the grower, the origin and verifies that the plant is eligible to move within the EU. Plants which must be accompanied by a plant passport are known as regulated plants. All producers of regulated plant material must apply to and be registered with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM).

My Department is responsible for checking these producers for compliance with the EU plant health requirements. Once these premises are inspected and are found to be compliant, the plants/plant products can qualify for plant passports and are then free to move within Ireland or to another EU Member State.

Specifically with regard to the party mentioned, authorisation to issue plant passports was initially approved in 2010 and subsequently removed in 2015, therefore preventing any further legitimate trade in certain regulated plants.

TAMS Payments

973. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a TAMS grant will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry following a successful review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36019/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Payment issued to the applicant concerned on 23 August 2018 in respect of investments under the Animal Welfare, Safety and Nutrient Storage Scheme of TAMS II.

TAMS Payments

974. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when TAMS grants for dairy equipment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36020/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The grant payment for the Dairy Equipment Scheme of TAMS II was paid to the applicant concerned on 14 August 2018.

GLAS Payments

975. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when

GLAS payments for 2016 and 2017 will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36021/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved into GLAS 2 with a contract commencement date of 1 January 2016 and has received the 2016 advance payment.

All cases must clear validation checks before payment can issue. In addition, this case was selected for inspection. Issues in relation to the inspection are near completion.

It is expected that the outstanding 2016 balance payment will issue shortly followed by the 2017 advance. GLAS payments are being made on a weekly basis as cases become eligible for payment.

Agriculture Scheme Appeals

976. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the case of a person (details supplied) will be examined; if an oral hearing can be held in the case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36025/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The recent reduction applied on the parcel in question arose as a result of standard eligibility checks carried out by my Department. As a follow up to this process, a field visit is to be carried out in order to establish the most up to date position. This process should be completed shortly, and the results will be communicated directly to the person named. Should the person named wish to lodge an appeal with the Agriculture Appeals Office, he can do so at that stage and seek an oral hearing.

Farm Household Incomes

977. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he will take to support the income of suckler farmers (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36026/18]

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

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

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

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

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

Fodder Crisis

978. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans for the winter 2018 fodder crisis (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36032/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I would like to give the Deputy a full account of the actions and measures I have put in place over the short last while to meet the challenges in this sector. Following the fodder difficulties of last Winter and Spring I formed a representative group chaired by Teagasc, including stakeholders such as Co-ops, banks, farm bodies, amongst others, to coordinate advisory messages to farmers this Summer around replenishing depleted stocks of fodder. I have requested the group to coordinate advice on managing grazing and fodder conservation through this extended period of extraordinarily dry weather. Practical advice is being shared across the group on dealing both with the current weather and on filling the significant fodder gap.

On the 26th June last, I launched a national fodder survey to be compiled by Teagasc through its client network as well as clients of the other fodder group stakeholders, with another survey being conducted this week. Given the findings of this survey, the overall priority must be to conserve as much fodder for the coming winter as possible when the opportunity to do so arises.

I met with Commissioner Hogan on the 24th July last and briefed him on the impact on Irish Agriculture of the dry spell. I secured agreement from the Commissioner to pay higher advance payments this autumn. As a result, advances for Pillar 1 and 2 payments will be increased to 70% and 85% respectively, resulting in €260 million in additional cash flow for farmers at a vital time of the year. I also proposed to Commissioner Hogan certain flexibilities for participants under the GLAS scheme which will replenish their fodder stocks for the winter period. In this connection I am pleased to have secured the agreement of the European Commission for these measures which, are now in place since 1st September and which together bring a potential additional 270,000 hectares into fodder production.

Furthermore on the 3rd August I announced a €2.75 million Fodder Production Incentive for Tillage Farmers to encourage tillage growers to actively engage in the fodder market. This measure will provide an incentive of €155 per hectare for tillage growers who grow a temporary crop of short rotation grasses for fodder production over the winter months and €100 per hectare for those growing catch crops such as fodder Rape, Turnips and Brassica crops. Currently over 23,000 hectares of catch crops are supported under the Agri-Environment Scheme, GLAS. This additional funding commitment aims to incentivise a doubling of this area. I am confident this measure will support Tillage farmers to supply into the market for fodder. Tillage farmers are a critical part of our agricultural sector, supplying the brewing and distilling industry, grain

to the feed industry and straw to the livestock sector, whilst also delivering other benefits.

Also, following consultation in August with my Government colleague the Minister for Planning, Housing and Local Government Mr. Eoghan Murphy T.D., flexibility has been granted on an extension to the closed period for spreading of chemical and organic fertilisers in order to capitalise on Autumn grass growth for fodder production. This extra two weeks granted by Minister Murphy will allow application up to the 30th September and 31st October respectively and again maximise the opportunity for Autumn production.

On the 22nd August I announced a €4.25million Fodder Import Support Measure for Autumn 2018. The measure seeks to reduce the cost to farmers of imported forage, that is: hay, silage, haylage, alfalfa and others from outside the island of Ireland. The measure will operate through the Co-operatives/registered importers and will cover forage imported from 12th August 2018 to 31st December 2018 and will of course be subject to EU State Aid (*de-minimis*) rules. I wish to confirm that while the measure will operate through the Co-operatives/registered importers, the actual beneficiaries will be farmers who need supplies of fodder.

I know that the range of measures introduced by me to-date taken together and targeted at producing as much fodder as possible from our own land provide the most effective response to a fodder shortfall. I can also assure you that I will continue to closely monitor and engage on this significant challenge during this difficult period.

Animal Culls

979. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of badgers culled in each of the years 2015 to 2017 and to date in 2018, nationally and by county in tabular form; the number tested for TB; the percentage that tested positive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36034/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The numbers of badgers culled annually are published as part of the Annual Report of the National Parks and Wildlife Service of the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, and I attach for the Deputy's convenience the figures for 2015 and 2016 extracted from those Annual Reports – tables 1 and 2 below. While the figures for 2017 are not yet published, I am in a position to attach the, as yet unconfirmed, figures for 2017 – table 3 - on the basis that they are subject to finalisation in consultation with the National Parks and Wildlife Service. Numbers are not yet available in respect of 2018 as these are normally prepared towards the end of each year in consultation with the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

Samples from culled badgers are not routinely cultured for TB, as previous studies have shown that the levels of TB in badgers is high when the TB prevalence in cattle locally is high. Similarly, when local bovine TB levels are lower, the levels of TB in badgers is lower. Tissues from badgers are tested for TB when required for specific studies, and the details of such tests carried out by my Department's Regional Veterinary Laboratories and the Irish Diagnostic Laboratory Services are provided in tables 4 and 5 below.

The Deputy should be aware that under current operating protocols, where herds are identified with a serious outbreak of bovine tuberculosis, and where my Department's epidemiological investigations into the cause of the breakdown implicates badgers as a possible source, a capturing program is set up in the local area. The aims of the program are to manage the local population of badgers downward to an average level of 0.5 badgers per Km² which is the optimal density that mitigates badger to cattle transmission. An annual culling effort is man-

aged to ensure these lower density levels are maintained. The long-term culling of badgers is not ideal or sustainable. They are protected by national legislation and are listed within the Berne Convention. Therefore, they are captured under a licence granted to my Department by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) of the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

Field trials testing the effectiveness of badger vaccination as an alternative to removal confirmed that vaccination of badgers can play a role in reducing the level of infection in cattle. From January 2018 the formal vaccination programme commenced in the areas which formed part of the field trials, i.e. in parts of counties Monaghan, Longford, Galway, Tipperary, Waterford, Kilkenny, Cork and in all of Louth. Badgers in a vaccination area will be captured/vaccinated/released instead of being captured/culled. The vaccination program will continue on an annual basis, so each year's births in vaccination areas will be vaccinated as they are captured. The vaccination area will be expanded incrementally to all parts of the country during the 2018-2022 period and it is anticipated that the rate of badger removal will reduce over that period. In areas with severe TB outbreaks epidemiologically linked to badgers, some level of badger removals may still continue to be necessary, but the overall level of removals is likely to be significantly reduced.

Table 1 - Badgers Captured per RVO area: 2015

RVO Office	Total Badgers
Carlow	138
Cavan	205
Clare	381
Cork Central	126
Cork North East	199
Donegal	273
Dublin	188
Galway	271
Kerry	312
Kildare	123
Kilkenny	172
Laois	125
Leitrim	298
Limerick	232
Longford	115
Louth	0
Mayo	376
Meath	208
Monaghan	168
Offaly	62
Roscommon	307
Sligo	172
Tipperary North	317
Tipperary South	200
Waterford	258
Westmeath	160

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RVO Office	Total Badgers
Wexford	430
Clonakilty	300
Total	6116

Table 2 - Badgers Captured per RVO area: 2016

RVO Office	Total Badgers
Carlow	153
Cavan	149
Clare	372
Cork Central	141
Cork North East	242
Donegal	254
Dublin	188
Galway	196
Kerry	288
Kildare	366
Kilkenny	155
Laois	186
Leitrim	285
Limerick	278
Longford	113
Louth	0
Mayo	341
Meath	145
Monaghan	109
Offaly	94
Roscommon	353
Sligo	155
Tipperary North	317
Tipperary South	196
Waterford	204
Westmeath	194
Wexford	405
Clonakilty	282
Total	6161

Table 3 - Badgers Captured per Regional Veterinary Office area: 2017

RVO Office	Total Badgers
Carlow	147
Cavan	201
Clare	401

RVO Office	Total Badgers
Cork Central	91
Cork North East	190
Donegal	231
Dublin	202
Galway	205
Kerry	303
Kildare	405
Kilkenny	142
Laois	85
Leitrim	295
Limerick	238
Longford	92
Louth	0
Mayo	285
Meath	127
Monaghan	193
Offaly	63
Roscommon	291
Sligo	133
Tipperary North	298
Tipperary South	168
Waterford	202
Westmeath	170
Wexford	330
Clonakilty	323
Total	5811

Table 4 - Badgers Tissue Analysis at Regional Veterinary Laboratory

Year	No. of Badgers tested for TB	No. of Badgers Positive	% Positive of total tested
2018 to date	134	42	31.34%
2017	152	42	27.63%
2016	166	44	26.5%
2015	220	53	24.09%

Table 5 - Badger Culture Analysis - Irish Diagnostic Laboratory Services (IDLS)

Year	No. of Badgers tested for TB	No. of Badgers Positive	% Positive of total tested	
2018 to date	None to date	None to date	None to date	Culturing to commence in late Sept. 2018
2017	282	31	10.99%	Some cultures are still incubating

2016	Not performed yet	Not performed Yet	None	Anticipate 300 to be performed in next 24 months
2015	1565	207	13.23%	

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Appeals

980. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if an appeal by a person (details supplied) in respect of an ANC payment for 2017 has been successful; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36074/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Agriculture Appeals Office has confirmed that an appeal was received from the person concerned on 5 March 2018. On receipt of the Department file the appeal was assigned to an Appeal Officer for their consideration. The Appeal decision letter issued to the person concerned on 25 May 2018 advising him of the outcome of his appeal.

Basic Payment Scheme Eligibility

981. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if hill land that is farmed in the traditional manner will now not need to be fenced in cases in which other general compliance measures are met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36118/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Terms and Conditions of the Basic Payments Scheme outline the requirements regarding the fencing of land. The Terms and Conditions state that there must be a defined external boundary, and that the boundary must be sufficient to control the farmers' and neighbouring animals.

The only exemption to the requirement for stock-proof fencing is outlined in the Department's publication "A Guide to Land Eligibility Direct Payment Schemes 2015", this publication was sent to all farmers in 2015. On the matter of fencing it states ;"An exemption to this rule is that the need for stock proof fencing is not required for exclusively owned hill lands, provided the lands continue to be farmed in the traditional manner by hill farmers in compliance with the requirements of the EU regulations". The land must be both actively farmed and farmed in the traditional manner. This traditional farming refers to farmers having the hill land and the appurtenant low land, so typically the farmer would graze the hills in summer and have the appurtenant low land for the winter period.

In cases where the land has been redistributed and therefore is no longer farmed in the traditional manner there may be issues regarding fencing requirements. The farmer can apply to the Local Authority to fence the lands, this decision is made in conjunction with the NPWS, where required.

GLAS Applications

982. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a GLAS 1 application by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36122/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015 and has received full payments for scheme years 2015 and 2016. The 2017 advance (85%) has also been paid with the 2017 balance delayed due to an outstanding Commonage Management Plan (CMP).

At the time the application was submitted on the Department's online application system the applicant's privately owned Natura land was not included. The approved GLAS contract did not include these lands.

My Department will review the position in relation to this application and will notify the applicant directly of the outcome once the review has been completed.

Pesticide Use

983. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to end the use of glyphosate following a case (details supplied) in the United States of America in summer 2018. [36178/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Regulatory decisions on the approval and use of pesticides are based on the scientific consensus view of all the relevant technical information from all sources.

Regarding the use of plant protection products containing glyphosate in Ireland, I continue to be guided by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA), who have both concluded, on the basis of extensive reviews involving public consultation, that glyphosate can be used safely without putting consumers or users at risk.

The Department will continue to monitor international peer reviewed scientific evidence and the guidance provided by EFSA and ECHA.

Aquaculture Licences

984. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the conclusions and findings contained in the newly updated draft appropriate assessment conclusion statement in which proposals to manage and licence aquaculture activities in the west of the Ardara/Maas Road Special Area of Conservation are outlined; his further views on whether the activities for which a licence is required would be consistent with conservation objectives for a Natura 2000 site; his further views on whether such activities will not lead to a disturbance to local habitats and species and will therefore not result in a deterioration to the attributes of same; the details of the information and the source of same which informed this statement; if he plans to approve the draft statement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36188/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): All applications for aquaculture licences are considered by my Department under the provisions of the 1997 Fisheries (Amendment) Act, the 1933 Foreshore Act and applicable EU legislation. The legislation provides for a period of public and statutory consultation.

All applications in 'Natura 2000 areas, i.e. areas designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and/or Special Protection Areas (SPAs), are required to be appropriately assessed for the purpose of environmental compliance with the EU Birds and/or Habitats Directives.

The obligation to undertake Appropriate Assessment derives from Article 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC as transposed into Irish legislation by the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011. West of Ardara/Maas Road has been designated by the National Parks and Wildlife Service as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) under the EU Habitats Directive. An Appropriate Assessment report has been completed by the Marine Institute in respect of aquaculture applications located in or adjacent to the West of Ardara / Maas Road SAC and considers the risks posed by the proposed activities to the conservation features of the Natura site. The assessment process complies with best scientific practice.

My Department has prepared a draft Appropriate Assessment Conclusion Statement which outlines how it is proposed to manage aquaculture in West of Ardara / Maas Road Special Area of Conservation in compliance with the Habitats Directive. This draft Conclusion Statement is available on my Department's website: *Draft Conclusion Statement*

The Appropriate Assessment Conclusion Statement, which is currently in draft form, supplements the Appropriate Assessment report and should be read in conjunction with it. The Conclusion Statement will be finalised taking account, if appropriate, of any written submissions or observations made to my Department during the public and statutory consultation phase for aquaculture applications as they relate to the conservation features in the West of Ardara/Maas Road SAC, and any other relevant information. The statutory and public consultation phase for aquaculture applications in this SAC has not yet been completed.

My Department is continuing to examine aquaculture applications in the West of Ardara/Maas Road SAC in accordance with the applicable legislation and full account is being taken of the engineering, scientific, environmental, legal and public policy aspects relevant to each application. Aquaculture projects in this SAC will only be authorized if they (individually or in combination with other plans or projects) do not give rise to significant adverse impacts on the integrity of West of Ardara / Maas Road SAC, having regard to its Conservation Objectives.

As the aquaculture licence applications in this SAC under active consideration as part of a statutory process it would not be appropriate to comment further on the matter at this time.

Fishery Harbour Centres

985. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding a contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36192/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Dingle Fishery Harbour Centre is one of the six designated Fishery Harbour Centres which are owned, managed and maintained by my Department under Statute.

In October 2017, under the Department's Fishery Harbour Centre Capital Development Works Programme, and following a public tendering exercise, LandM Keating Ltd were awarded the contract to undertake capital dredging works at Dingle FHC to dredge the main navigation channel in Dingle FHC and to create a new vessel turning area at the main pier.

Over the course of the works, the contractor constructed a temporary access road along the foreshore. Arrangements made between the contractor and the individual concerned were a private matter between the contractor and the individual. My Department was not party to, nor aware of the details of any such agreement.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

986. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the payment for suckler cow farmers will be increased to €200 per suckler cow (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36212/18]

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

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

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

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

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

Basic Payment Scheme Penalties

987. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the case of a person (details supplied) who had a penalty on the person's farm payments will be examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36261/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The penalty applied under the 2017 Basic Payment Scheme relates to breaches of Cross Compliance requirements. Under the Terms and Conditions of the Basic Payment Scheme, an applicant, as well as meeting the scheme criteria, must comply with EU regulatory requirements relating to Cross Compliance.

A report detailing findings of an inspection carried out by my Departments Agri Environment Structures Division on 26 October 2017 was referred to my Department's Cross Compliance Unit for attention. This report detailed breaches relating to the cross compliance require-

ments in respect of Statutory Management Requirement (SMR) 1 which relates to Nitrates.

The breaches resulted in a 20% penalty being applied against the 2017 Direct Schemes payments.

The person named was notified of this decision on 5th February 2018 and of their right to seek a review of the findings from the District Inspector. To date no such review request has been received.

In the event that the person named is dissatisfied with the outcome of any such review, the decision can be appealed to the independent Agriculture Appeals Office, within 3 months.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

988. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if farming payments will be issued on time in view of the pending fodder crisis (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36263/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department administers a wide range of schemes which provide vital support to underpin the continued sustainability and growth of the agri-food sector. With the challenging weather conditions experienced by farmers this year, I am keenly aware of the importance of these supports for farmers, and accordingly the issuing of payments under these schemes is a matter of priority for my Department.

The main schemes are delivered under the framework of the EU Common Agricultural Policy, and each year approximately €1.5bn issues under these schemes. My Department has a strong record in the efficient delivery of these payments, as evidenced by the fact that we perform very favourably compared to other EU Member States in terms of both the dates on which payments are delivered and our ability to maximise the drawdown of available EU funding.

In terms of the individual schemes, The Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) Scheme is due to commence payment on schedule again this year. In 2017, in the week beginning 18th September, payments in excess of €160 million issued to over 75,000 farmers. This represented a significant increase over the 65,000 paid at the same stage in 2016.

The main Direct Payment scheme is the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS). Advance payments are due to commence on 16 October this year, which is the first date permissible under the EU Regulations. In light of the challenging conditions experienced in 2018, agreement has been reached that the advance payment rate will be set at 70% for 2018, rather than the 50% provided for in EU regulations.

Following the first payments issuing on 16th October, regular payment runs will be made in respect of all applicants whose applications are fully processed and who have no outstanding errors. The balancing payment, at a rate of 30%, will begin to issue to farmers at the beginning of December.

For the 2017 BPS advance payment, 111,000 farmers received an advance payment totalling some €700 million on the first pay run, representing an increase from the 109,000 farmers paid at the same stage in 2016.

2017 GLAS advance payments commenced in November 2017. To date 99.7% of eligible advances have been paid. GLAS balance payments commenced on schedule in May 2018. To

date 99% of eligible cases have been paid. The bulk of outstanding payments are due to the non submission of Commonage Management Plans (CMPs), Nutrient Management Plans (NMPS) and non participation in GLAS training. 2018 advance payments are on track to commence in November and will be paid at the higher rate of 85%. GLAS payments continue to issue on a weekly basis.

To assist farmers in replenishing their fodder stocks, flexibilities have been introduced in the GLAS scheme for the LIPP and EMFL actions. LIPP parcels can be cut for the production of hay or silage from 1 September to 30 November 30. In addition off takes can be removed from GLAS fallow land parcels for the production of fodder during the same period. These derogations will apply for 2018 only. Standard scheme specification apply from 1 December 2018 onwards.

Departmental Communications

989. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the positions in his Department and the organisations under its aegis that have arrangements in place for lo-call numbers or 1800, 1850 and 1890 telephone numbers for members of the public to contact his Department or organisations under its aegis; the number of these that are completely free to call for persons who use mobile telephones and may incur major bills phoning such organisations; if the situation will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36391/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department has mostly phased out the use of 1800, 1850 and 1890 for members of the public to contact this Department. Telephone contact is facilitated through a combination of geographic area code numbers (057, 021, 01 etc.), and the Non-Geographic Number (NGN) 0761 range. However, to avoid possible confusion or delays the 1850 “out of hours emergency contact number” continues to be provided as an option.

Where previously used 1850/1890 numbers have been replaced the caller receives a message informing them of the change of number and there is no charge to the caller for such calls.

The call tariffs applied may vary across the different service providers, depending on each subscriber’s contract and whether they are calling on a mobile or a landline.

The Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg), as part of its remit as the statutory body responsible for the regulation of the electronic communications sector (telecommunications, radio communications, broadcasting transmission and premium rate services) and the postal sector, has undertaken a review of Non-Geographic Numbers.

In July 2018 ComReg published a “Response to Consultation and Draft Decision” document (ComReg 18/65) regarding the future use of these NGN ranges and directions on handling these numbers from a tariff perspective.

My Department will review the use of NGN’s in line with the ComReg Decision on their use when finalised.

As regards the organisations under the aegis of my Department, the information requested is an operational matter for the agencies themselves.

990. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the Council of Europe recommendation concerning fur animals and specifically the practice of farming the mink species here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36440/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I am familiar with the recommendations in the report of the Standing Committee of the European Convention for the Protection of Animals kept for Farming Purposes, concerning fur animals 1999.

My Department has statutory responsibility for the welfare and protection of farmed animals under the European Communities (Welfare of Farmed Animals) Regulations, 2010 (Statutory Instrument No 311/2010) and the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013. Irish fur farmers are, in this regard, subject to the same animal welfare legislation as other livestock farmers.

A review of all aspects of fur farming in Ireland was commissioned in November 2011. The Terms of Reference of the Review Group were:

(i) To review fur farming in Ireland taking into account existing legislative provisions for the licensing of mink farming;

(ii) To comment on the economic benefits of the sector;

(iii) To consider the effectiveness of existing welfare controls, and

(iv) To make appropriate recommendations

The Review Group invited submissions from the public and interested parties and considered over four hundred submissions which were received.

The Group concluded that it did not find the arguments in favour of banning the farming of fur animals in Ireland compelling and recommended that instead, fur farming be allowed continue under licence and subject to official control.

On foot of the Review Group's deliberations, my Department introduced more rigorous controls on licence holders in the areas of animal welfare, animal accommodation, security and nutrient management. Licensees are subject to regular inspections, including unannounced inspections by Department officials.

In the circumstances, I have therefore implemented the recommendations of the group in full.

Sheep Welfare Scheme

991. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a decision has been made on a review of a sheep welfare scheme penalty in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36441/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The 2017 application of the person named was selected for a Sheep Welfare Scheme inspection, the outcome of which resulted in a reduction in payment being applied.

The person named was notified of this outcome and has sought a review of the inspection findings. The matter is currently being examined by officials in my Department. The person named will be notified of the outcome on completion of this process shortly.

In the event that the person named is dissatisfied with the outcome of this review, the decision can be appealed to the independent Agriculture Appeals Office.

Basic Payment Scheme Data

992. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of farmers who submitted a BPS application in 2018 who have parcels of land within designated areas; the number of these farmers by county; the amount of designated land these farmers have within zero to five, five to ten, ten to 15 hectares and so on in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36455/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The data requested in relation to 2018 BPS applications with parcels designated under the Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme is set out in the spread sheet at the following link.

[2018 ANC Land Stats report]

Aquaculture Licence Applications

993. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 450 of 19 June 2018, the status of an aquaculture licence application by a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36478/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As the Deputy is aware, my Department received an application for an Aquaculture Licence from the person referred to by the Deputy in June 2017.

There were a number of technical and scientific complexities associated with the application which were examined by my Department in conjunction with the Marine Institute. This examination is now complete.

As the application is currently being assessed by my Department in accordance with the statutory process it would not be appropriate for me to comment further pending the conclusion of that process.

Basic Payment Scheme Payments

994. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a farm payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36571/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The case in question relates to an over claim on a 2015 Basic Payment application. The matter has now been fully resolved and the relevant payment will issue shortly.

Departmental Funding

995. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if Sligo County Council will be assisted with the cost of removing a 2.5 tonne whale carcass that has washed ashore to help to stop the spread of pollution into Sligo Bay and onto Strandhill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36583/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The issue referred to by the Deputy is a matter for the Local Authority. The removal of organic waste material from beaches does not come under the remit of my Department.

Illegal Dumping

996. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the deterrents in place to prevent illegal dumping in Coillte forests and lakes in counties Cavan and Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36586/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Coillte was established as a private commercial company under the Forestry Act, 1988 and day-to-day operational matters, such as the management of its forest estate, are the responsibility of the company.

Bye-laws were introduced under Section 37 of the Forestry Act 1988, at the request of Coillte, to regulate illegal or unauthorised activities by members of the public on its property. Illegal dumping is one of the unauthorised activities encompassed by those Bye-Laws.

The matter was raised with Coillte who advise that, due to the extent and location of the Coillte estate, illegal dumping is a significant issue for the company. The company advise that it has six Business Area Units across the country, each with a specific function in relation to the management of broad estate issues like dumping.

I understand that the company's Midlands Business Area Unit, which covers almost ten counties including Cavan and Monaghan, will spend approximately €20,000 on waste disposal associated with illegal dumping this year. Coillte advise that this is double the expected amount indicating a higher level of dumping activity in general.

Coillte advise that it is committed to ensuring that visitors can enjoy visiting its forest parks and trails without the sight of illegally dumped rubbish. The company adds that, to deter illegal dumping, it installs signs, barriers and CCTV at illegal dumping hotspots. I am advised that Coillte is currently trialling a 'Confidential Line' which will be displayed on the company website and signage, with information gathered to be filtered back to staff either through e-mail or by phone on more urgent items. Coillte advise that it actively investigates all reports of dumping and, where evidence is found of those responsible, it is passed on to local authority Litter Wardens who are responsible for issuing fines and pursuing prosecutions. The company add that it has good working relations with all Local Authorities to manage and remove dumped material.

Aquaculture Licence Applications

997. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if an application for a licence by a person (details supplied) can be amended to include another species; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36605/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Depart-

ment considers all applications for aquaculture licences in accordance with the provisions of the 1997 Fisheries (Amendment) Act, the 1933 Foreshore Act and applicable EU legislation. The licensing process involves consultation with a wide range of scientific and technical advisers as well as various Statutory Consultees. The legislation also provides for a period of public consultation.

In addition, the legislation governing aquaculture licensing provides for an appeals mechanism. Appeals against licence decisions are a matter for the Aquaculture Licences Appeals Board (ALAB) which is an independent statutory body. Full details of the appeals process can be obtained at: <http://www.alab.ie/appealsprocess/>.

In accordance with the applicable legislation, the Statutory and Public Consultation phase in respect of this application is now concluded. Every effort is being made to expedite a decision on this application having regard to the complexities involved. As this licence application is under active consideration as part of a statutory process it would not be appropriate to comment further on the matter at this time.

Fodder Crisis

998. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he is considering long-term measures and proposals that will seek to avoid further livestock fodder shortages in future years. [36708/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In order to address fodder issues arising from the prolonged wet winter and spring of this year I formed a representative group chaired by Teagasc, including stakeholders such as Co-ops, banks, farm bodies amongst others, to coordinate advisory messages to farmers around replenishing depleted stocks of fodder in advance of next winter. I further requested the group to co-ordinate advice on managing grazing and fodder conservation through the extended period of dry weather throughout the summer. Practical advice on fodder conservation options this autumn are being shared across the group and with the wider farming community.

Once we finally navigate our way out the other side of this really difficult period, it is an absolute priority to make sure that in future years enough fodder is conserved to deal with whatever weather conditions future winters may bring. I am asking Teagasc to make it a matter of priority in its advisory campaign to advise farmers on how best to build back up stocks of fodder. It is important that we learn some of the lessons from this Spring and Summer and build resilience into our systems going forward.

As the most recent weather events have shown, farmers should have access to measures that improve their capacity to respond to these occurrences. I have asked my officials, in the context of the upcoming CAP reform, to examine all available risk management tools to determine which of these may be most appropriate to the farming sector.

Fodder Crisis

999. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the measures he plans to take to address the impending fodder shortage in autumn 2018. [36709/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I would like to give the Deputy a full account of the actions and measures I have put in place over the last

short while to meet the challenges in this sector. Following the fodder difficulties of last Winter and Spring I formed a representative group chaired by Teagasc, including stakeholders such as Co-ops, banks, farm bodies, amongst others, to coordinate advisory messages to farmers this Summer around replenishing depleted stocks of fodder. I have requested the group to coordinate advice on managing grazing and fodder conservation through this extended period of extraordinarily dry weather. Practical advice is being shared across the group on dealing both with the current weather and on filling the significant fodder gap.

On 26 June last, I launched a national fodder survey to be compiled by Teagasc through its client network as well as clients of the other fodder group stakeholders, with another survey being conducted this week. Given the findings of this survey, the overall priority must be to conserve as much fodder for the coming winter as possible when the opportunity to do so arises.

I met with Commissioner Hogan on 24 July last and briefed him on the impact on Irish Agriculture of the dry spell. I secured agreement from the Commissioner to pay higher advance payments this Autumn. As a result, advances for Pillar 1 and 2 payments will be increased to 70% and 85% respectively, resulting in €260 million in additional cash flow for farmers at a vital time of the year. I also proposed to Commissioner Hogan certain flexibilities for participants under the GLAS scheme which will replenish their fodder stocks for the winter period. In this connection I am pleased to have secured the agreement of the European Commission for these measures which are now in place since 1 September and which together bring a potential additional 270,000 hectares into fodder production.

Furthermore on 3 August I announced a €2.75 million Fodder Production Incentive for Tillage Farmers to encourage tillage growers to actively engage in the fodder market. This measure will provide an incentive of €155 per hectare for tillage growers who grow a temporary crop of short rotation grasses for fodder production over the winter months and €100 per hectare for those growing catch crops such as fodder Rape, Turnips and Brassica crops. Currently over 23,000 hectares of catch crops are supported under the Agri-Environment Scheme, GLAS. This additional funding commitment aims to incentivise a doubling of this area. I am confident this measure will support Tillage farmers to supply into the market for fodder. Tillage farmers are a critical part of our agricultural sector, supplying the brewing and distilling industry, grain to the feed industry and straw to the livestock sector, whilst also delivering other benefits.

Also, following consultation in August with my Government colleague the Minister for Planning, Housing and Local Government Mr. Eoghan Murphy T.D. flexibility has been granted on an extension to the closed period for spreading of chemical and organic fertilisers in order to capitalise on autumn grass growth for fodder production. This extra two weeks granted by Minister Murphy will allow application up to 30 September and 31 October respectively and again maximise the opportunity for Autumn production.

On 22 August I announced a €4.25million Fodder Import Support Measure for Autumn 2018. The measure seeks to reduce the cost to farmers of imported forage, that is: hay, silage, haylage, alfalfa and others from outside the island of Ireland. The measure will operate through the Co-operatives/registered importers and will cover forage imported from 12 August 2018 to 31 December 2018 and will of course be subject to EU State Aid (*de-minimis*) rules. I wish to confirm that while the measure will operate through the Co-operatives/registered importers, the actual beneficiaries will be farmers who need supplies of fodder.

I know that the range of measures introduced by me to-date taken together and targeted at producing as much fodder as possible from our own land provide the most effective response to a fodder shortfall. I can also assure you that I will continue to closely monitor and engage on this significant challenge during this difficult period.

Basic Payment Scheme Appeals

1000. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied) regarding a farm payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36750/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department received an appeal from the company named in respect of the burning of land outside of the permitted period in 2017. Such lands are not eligible for payment under the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and this has created an over claim on the company's BPS application.

Following a review, my Department has decided to waive the administrative penalty applied in this case. However, the over claimed land has been excluded from the company's BPS application and payment issued on 9 May 2018 on the remaining eligible hectares. A letter detailing the position issued to the company named which also outlined the option of appealing the decision to the Agriculture Appeals Office.

Further information was submitted on behalf of the company named on 30 August 2018, however the position remains unchanged.

Agriculture Scheme Appeals

1001. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the outcome of an appeal by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36777/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Having reviewed the documentation on file for the person named, it has been established that underpayments exist for scheme years 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009. Officials in the Department are currently arranging for the person named to be paid the amounts owed and they will be in contact shortly with the person named.

Agriculture Cashflow Support Loan Scheme

1002. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to introduce low cost credit facilities for farmers facing financial difficulties; when the scheme will be introduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36827/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): One of my priorities is to improve access to finance for the agri-food sector. I announced in Budget 2018 that my Department is considering the development of potential Brexit response loan schemes for farmers, fishermen and for longer-term capital financing for food businesses. These schemes are developed and delivered in cooperation with the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland and take time to develop and operationalise. Consideration and discussions with the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and the Department of Finance are ongoing on a long-term investment scheme and an announcement in this regard is expected to be made shortly.

While continuing to explore additional funding mechanisms to address gaps in the market, I also liaise with the main banks on access to finance issues relating to the agri-food sector. I have had ongoing engagement with the banks on the cash flow pressures arising from the ef-

fects of the weather on grazing and fodder stocks and I welcome that they are following through on their commitment to support the sector. The delivery of last year's Agriculture Cash Flow Loan Scheme is acting as a catalyst to encourage financial institutions to improve and develop new loan products for the sector. A recently announced initiative by one of the main banks mirrors the Agriculture Cashflow Support Loan Scheme in offering a discounted interest rate with extended and flexible repayment terms. The 'Milk Flex' loan product developed by the Irish Strategic Investment Fund, with dairy co-op and private banking participation, is another good example of innovation in this regard.

I know that many farmers will be relying heavily on co-op and merchant credit to navigate through the current situation. Therefore, I have also welcomed recent initiatives by co-ops in relation to credit facilities for their suppliers.

Fodder Crisis

1003. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the measures he plans to introduce to ensure that there are adequate supplies of fodder and foodstuff for the coming winter and spring; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36828/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I would like to give the Deputy a full account of the actions and measures I have put in place over the last short while to meet the challenges in this sector. Following the fodder difficulties of last Winter and Spring I formed a representative group chaired by Teagasc, including stakeholders such as Co-ops, banks, farm bodies, amongst others, to coordinate advisory messages to farmers this Summer around replenishing depleted stocks of fodder. I have requested the group to coordinate advice on managing grazing and fodder conservation through this extended period of extraordinarily dry weather. Practical advice is being shared across the group on dealing both with the current weather and on filling the significant fodder gap.

On 26 June last, I launched a national fodder survey to be compiled by Teagasc through its client network as well as clients of the other fodder group stakeholders, with another survey being conducted this week. Given the findings of this survey, the overall priority must be to conserve as much fodder for the coming Winter as possible when the opportunity to do so arises.

I met with Commissioner Hogan on 24 July last and briefed him on the impact on Irish Agriculture of the dry spell. I secured agreement from the Commissioner to pay higher advance payments this Autumn. As a result, advances for Pillar 1 and 2 payments will be increased to 70% and 85% respectively, resulting in €260 million in additional cash flow for farmers at a vital time of the year. I also proposed to Commissioner Hogan certain flexibilities for participants under the GLAS scheme which will replenish their fodder stocks for the Winter period. In this connection I am pleased to have secured the agreement of the European Commission for these measures which, are now in place since 1 September and which together bring a potential additional 270,000 hectares into fodder production.

Furthermore on 3 August I announced a €2.75 million Fodder Production Incentive for Tillage Farmers to encourage tillage growers to actively engage in the fodder market. This measure will provide an incentive of €155 per hectare for tillage growers who grow a temporary crop of short rotation grasses for fodder production over the winter months and €100 per hectare for those growing catch crops such as fodder Rape, Turnips and Brassica crops. Currently over 23,000 hectares of catch crops are supported under the Agri-Environment Scheme, GLAS. This additional funding commitment aims to incentivise a doubling of this area. I am confident this measure will support Tillage farmers to supply into the market for fodder. Tillage farmers are a

critical part of our agricultural sector, supplying the brewing and distilling industry, grain to the feed industry and straw to the livestock sector, whilst also delivering other benefits.

Also, following consultation in August with my Government colleague the Minister for Planning, Housing and Local Government Mr. Eoghan Murphy T.D., flexibility has been granted on an extension to the closed period for spreading of chemical and organic fertilisers in order to capitalise on Autumn grass growth for fodder production. This extra two weeks granted by Minister Murphy will allow application up to 30 September and 31 October respectively and again maximise the opportunity for Autumn production.

On 22 August I announced a €4.25million Fodder Import Support Measure for Autumn 2018. The measure seeks to reduce the cost to farmers of imported forage, that is: hay, silage, haylage, alfalfa and others from outside the island of Ireland. The measure will operate through the Co-operatives/registered importers and will cover forage imported from 12 August 2018 to 31 December 2018 and will of course be subject to EU State Aid (*de-minimis*) rules. I wish to confirm that while the measure will operate through the Co-operatives/registered importers, the actual beneficiaries will be farmers who need supplies of fodder.

I know that the range of measures introduced by me to-date taken together and targeted at producing as much fodder as possible from our own land provide the most effective response to a fodder shortfall. I can also assure you that I will continue to closely monitor and engage on this significant challenge during this difficult period.

Basic Payment Scheme Eligibility

1004. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a parcel of land (details supplied) has entitlements; if this parcel can now be classified as clean land; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36901/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Under the Basic Payment Scheme, payment entitlements are not linked with specific parcels of land. In order to receive payment under the Basic Payment Scheme an applicant must declare one eligible hectare for each payment entitlement that is held.

With regard to the classification of particular land parcels as clean land, any land declared in support of an application for an area based scheme is subject to administrative and on-farm checks as required to determine eligibility.

Fodder Crisis

1005. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the proposals he has put to the European Commission in relation to the provision of assistance to farmers facing difficulties with inadequate fodder supplies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36931/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I would like to give the Deputy a full account of the actions and measures I have put in place over the last short while to meet the challenges in this sector. Following the fodder difficulties of last Winter and Spring I formed a representative group chaired by Teagasc, including stakeholders such as Co-ops, banks, farm bodies, amongst others, to coordinate advisory messages to farmers this Summer around replenishing depleted stocks of fodder.

With respect to engaging with the EU Commission I met with Commissioner Hogan on the 24th July last and briefed him on the impact on Irish Agriculture of the dry spell. I secured agreement from the Commissioner to pay higher advance payments this Autumn. As a result, advances for Pillar 1 and 2 payments will be increased to 70% and 85% respectively, resulting in €260 million in additional cash flow for farmers at a vital time of the year. I also proposed to Commissioner Hogan certain flexibilities for participants under the GLAS scheme which will replenish their fodder stocks for the Winter period. In this connection I am pleased to have secured the agreement of the European Commission for these measures which, are now in place since 1st September and which together bring a potential additional 270,000 hectares into fodder production. I have also highlighted the difficulties facing Irish farmers with my EU Ministerial colleagues at a meeting of Agriculture Ministers in Brussels in July.

In addition and following consultation in August with my Government colleague the Minister for Planning, Housing and Local Government Mr. Eoghan Murphy T.D. and with the EU Commission, flexibility has been granted on an extension to the closed period for spreading of chemical and organic fertilisers in order to capitalise on Autumn grass growth for fodder production. This extra two weeks granted by Minister Murphy will allow application up to the 30th September and 31st October respectively and again maximise the opportunity for Autumn production.

Furthermore on the 3rd August I announced a €2.75 million Fodder Production Incentive for Tillage Farmers to encourage tillage growers to actively engage in the fodder market. This measure will provide an incentive of €155 per hectare for tillage growers who grow a temporary crop of short rotation grasses for fodder production over the winter months and €100 per hectare for those growing catch crops such as fodder Rape, Turnips and Brassica crops. Currently over 23,000 hectares of catch crops are supported under the Agri-Environment Scheme, GLAS. This additional funding commitment aims to incentivise a doubling of this area. I am confident this measure will support Tillage farmers to supply into the market for fodder. Tillage farmers are a critical part of our agricultural sector, supplying the brewing and distilling industry, grain to the feed industry and straw to the livestock sector, whilst also delivering other benefits.

On the 22nd August I announced a €4.25million Fodder Import Support Measure for Autumn 2018. The measure seeks to reduce the cost to farmers of imported forage, that is: hay, silage, haylage, alfalfa and others from outside the island of Ireland. The measure will operate through the Co-operatives/registered importers and will cover forage imported from 12th August 2018 to 31st December 2018 and will of course be subject to EU State Aid (*de-minimis*) rules. I wish to confirm that while the measure will operate through the Co-operatives/registered importers, the actual beneficiaries will be farmers who need supplies of fodder.

I know that the range of measures introduced by me to-date taken together and targeted at producing as much fodder as possible from our own land provide the most effective response to a fodder shortfall. I can also assure you that I will continue to closely monitor and engage on this significant challenge during this difficult period.

Beef Industry

1006. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the beef forum is due to next meet; and the number of meetings to date since the forum was established, in tabular form. [36932/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The next Beef forum is scheduled for early October 2018 and will be the 12th convening of the forum. The

meetings to date have been held as follows:

- 1 - April 2014
- 2 - June 2014
- 3 - October 2014
- 4 - November 2014
- 5 - February 2015
- 6 - July 2015
- 7 - December 2015
- 8 - July 2016
- 9 - November 2016
- 10 - July 2017
- 11 - February 2018.

Dairy Sector

1007. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the dairy forum is due to next meet; and the number of meetings to date since the forum was established, in tabular form. [36933/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): There have been 5 meetings of the Dairy Forum since the first meeting held on 29th September 2015. I am very conscious of the issues that dairy farmers have been presented with in 2018 and I hope to convene the next meeting of the Dairy Forum at the earliest opportunity.

The following is the breakdown of meetings to date:

- 1 - September 2015
- 2 - March 2016
- 3 - June 2016
- 4 - December 2016
- 5 - September 2017.

Tillage Sector

1008. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the tillage forum is due to next meet; and the number of meetings to date since the forum was established, in tabular form. [36934/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The following is the position regarding the number of Tillage Forum meetings held:

I have chaired two meetings of the Tillage Forum, the first was held on the 6 October 2016 and another Forum was held on the 16 February 2017 .

A further meeting of the Tillage Forum is not currently tabled however, I do wish to add that the stakeholders, including the farming organisations have continued to engage with me and my Department on a regular basis. One such meeting led to the Fodder Production Incentive Measure for Tillage Farmers whereby I provided €2.75 million in funding to support the tillage sector role in producing additional fodder for livestock farmers.

Agriculture Industry

1009. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the costs associated with running and facilitating the various round table forums in each sector including beef, dairy, tillage and so on, in tabular form. [36935/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In 2017 and 2018, I facilitated meetings of roundtable forums for the beef, dairy and tillage sectors. These forums have built on the success of the Beef Roundtable which had its first meeting in April 2014.

Roundtable forums bring together all stakeholders for constructive discussion on how the various sectors in Irish agriculture can develop and meet challenges as they arise, with the overall aim of realising the objectives laid down for them in Food Wise 2025.

Costs are kept to a minimum including holding meetings in-house wherever possible. The total cost to date is €4,720 – the breakdown per sector reflects the number of meetings per sector held to date.

The costs of the roundtable meetings that have been held thus far are as follows:

	€		€		€
Beef Round Table Costs	€3,583	Dairy Round Table Costs	€764	Tillage Round Table Costs	€373

Fodder Crisis

1010. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to introduce a crisis hardship fund to support farmers that have had to expend significant funds to source fodder and feed cattle as result of reduced fodder availability as a result of severe drought summer type conditions. [36939/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I would like to give the Deputy a full account of the actions and measures I have put in place over the short last while to meet the challenges in this sector. Following the fodder difficulties of last Winter and Spring I formed a representative group chaired by Teagasc, including stakeholders such as Co-ops, banks, farm bodies, among others, to coordinate advisory messages to farmers this Summer around replenishing depleted stocks of fodder. I have requested the group to coordinate advice on managing grazing and fodder conservation through this extended period of extraordinarily dry weather. Practical advice is being shared across the group on dealing both with the current weather and on filling the significant fodder gap.

On the 26th June last, I launched a national fodder survey to be compiled by Teagasc through its client network as well as clients of the other fodder group stakeholders, with another survey being conducted this week. Given the findings of this survey, the overall priority must be to conserve as much fodder for the coming Winter as possible when the opportunity to do so arises.

I met with Commissioner Hogan on the 24th July last and briefed him on the impact on Irish Agriculture of the dry spell. I secured agreement from the Commissioner to pay higher advance payments this autumn. As a result, advances for Pillar 1 and 2 payments will be increased to 70% and 85% respectively, resulting in €260 million in additional cash flow for farmers at a vital time of the year. I also proposed to Commissioner Hogan certain flexibilities for participants under the GLAS scheme which will replenish their fodder stocks for the winter period. In this connection I am pleased to have secured the agreement of the European Commission for these measures which, are now in place since 1st September and which together bring a potential additional 270,000 hectares into fodder production.

Furthermore on the 3rd August I announced a €2.75 million Fodder Production Incentive for Tillage Farmers to encourage tillage growers to actively engage in the fodder market. This measure will provide an incentive of €155 per hectare for tillage growers who grow a temporary crop of short rotation grasses for fodder production over the winter months and €100 per hectare for those growing catch crops such as fodder Rape, Turnips and Brassica crops. Currently over 23,000 hectares of catch crops are supported under the Agri-Environment Scheme, GLAS. This additional funding commitment aims to incentivise a doubling of this area. I am confident this measure will support Tillage farmers to supply into the market for fodder. Tillage farmers are a critical part of our agricultural sector, supplying the brewing and distilling industry, grain to the feed industry and straw to the livestock sector, whilst also delivering other benefits.

Also, following consultation in August with my Government colleague, the Minister for Planning, Housing and Local Government, Mr. Eoghan Murphy T.D., flexibility has been granted on an extension to the closed period for spreading of chemical and organic fertilisers in order to capitalise on Autumn grass growth for fodder production. This extra two weeks granted by Minister Murphy will allow application up to the 30th September and 31st October respectively and again maximise the opportunity for Autumn production.

On the 22nd August I announced a €4.25million Fodder Import Support Measure for Autumn 2018. The measure seeks to reduce the cost to farmers of imported forage, that is: hay, silage, haylage, alfalfa and others from outside the island of Ireland. The measure will operate through the Co-operatives/registered importers and will cover forage imported from 12th August 2018 to 31st December 2018 and will of course be subject to EU State Aid (*de-minimis*) rules. I wish to confirm that while the measure will operate through the Co-operatives/registered importers, the actual beneficiaries will be farmers who need supplies of fodder.

I know that the range of measures introduced by me to-date taken together and targeted at producing as much fodder as possible from our own land provide the most effective response to a fodder shortfall. I can also assure you that I will continue to closely monitor and engage on this significant challenge during this difficult period.

Fodder Crisis

1011. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to introduce a low cost loan scheme to support farmers that have had to expend significant funds to source fodder and feed as a result of severe drought summer type conditions and reduced prices for produce. [36940/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): One of my priorities is to improve access to finance for the agri-food sector. I announced in Budget 2018 that my Department is considering the development of potential Brexit response loan schemes for farmers, fishermen and for longer-term capital financing for food businesses. These schemes are developed and delivered in cooperation with the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland and take time to develop and operationalise. Consideration and discussions with the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and the Department of Finance are ongoing on a long-term investment scheme and an announcement in this regard is expected to be made shortly.

While continuing to explore additional funding mechanisms to address gaps in the market, I also liaise with the main banks on access to finance issues relating to the agri-food sector. I have had ongoing engagement with the banks on the cash flow pressures arising from the effects of the weather on grazing and fodder stocks and I welcome that they are following through on their commitment to support the sector. The delivery of last year's Agriculture Cash Flow Loan Scheme is acting as a catalyst to encourage financial institutions to improve and develop new loan products for the sector. A recently announced initiative by one of the main banks mirrors the Agriculture Cashflow Support Loan Scheme in offering a discounted interest rate with extended and flexible repayment terms. The 'Milk Flex' loan product developed by the Irish Strategic Investment Fund, with dairy co-op and private banking participation, is another good example of innovation in this regard.

I know that many farmers will be relying heavily on co-op and merchant credit to navigate through the current situation. Therefore, I have also welcomed recent initiatives by co-ops in relation to credit facilities for their suppliers.

Agriculture Scheme Data

1012. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons that applied to the 2018 national reserve without having completed a green certificate by the May 2018 deadline. [36941/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Processing of applications under the 2018 National Reserve is ongoing. Details of the number of applicants that applied to the 2018 National Reserve without having completed the required agricultural educational qualification by the closing date for receipt of applications of 15th May 2018 will be available when processing of all applications has been completed.

Payments under the 2018 National Reserve are due to commence in early December 2018 following the issuing of balancing payments under the Basic Payment Scheme.

Agriculture Scheme Data

1013. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of applications to the 2018 national reserve and young farmers scheme by county, in tabular form. [36942/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The number of applications received under the 2018 National Reserve and the 2018 Young Farmers Scheme, by county, is set out in the following table:

County	2018 National Reserve applications	2018 Young Farmers Scheme applications
Carlow	6	127
Cavan	35	391
Clare	35	417
Cork	101	1,137
Donegal	33	403
Dublin	3	43
Galway	96	864
Kerry	50	542
Kildare	15	153
Kilkenny	32	342
Laois	14	296
Leitrim	12	251
Limerick	30	381
Longford	17	169
Louth	8	100
Mayo	106	796
Meath	32	287
Monaghan	21	243
Offaly	13	275
Roscommon	29	371
Sligo	29	238
Tipperary	56	548
Waterford	20	245
Westmeath	17	198
Wexford	15	384
Wicklow	19	170

In addition to the figures in the table, there are further applications to the 2018 National Reserve and the 2018 Young Farmers Scheme which were submitted under temporary reference numbers (where an application for a herd number has been made and is currently being processed). Therefore the figures in the table are subject to change.

Livestock Issues

1014. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of suckler cows by county, in tabular form. [36943/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The following table shows the number of suckler cows per county as of June 30th 2018. Please note that data on suckler cow numbers provided to the Deputy previously were given on the basis of numbers in December of the relevant years and are therefore not directly comparable with the figures below due to seasonality factors.

COUNTY	SUCKLERS
Carlow	15,816
Cavan	45,747
Clare	71,015
Cork	73,699
Donegal	39,670
Dublin	4,465
Galway	102,405
Kerry	45,441
Kildare	18,636
Kilkenny	33,043
Laois	34,206
Leitrim	26,484
Limerick	34,903
Longford	25,955
Louth	11,917
Mayo	76,043
Meath	34,905
Monaghan	32,142
Offaly	31,246
Roscommon	53,382
Sligo	30,921
Tipperary	57,365
Waterford	20,655
Westmeath	36,352
Wexford	32,646
Wicklow	22,695

TB Eradication Scheme

1015. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if adequate financial support will be provided for farmers to ensure they are not disadvantaged when TB controls are imposed on their farms. [36944/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The bovine TB eradication Scheme is an example of a shared animal health programme administered by my Department to the benefit of all related stakeholders. Thanks to the efforts of all stakeholders, bovine TB levels have reduced significantly in recent years. Herd incidence stood at 8% in 2000 and was under 3.5% in 2017. This represents considerable progress. In the absence of a robust TB eradication Scheme, many more farmers would have suffered a TB breakdown. When a breakdown occurs, certain controls are put in place in an effort to eradicate the disease from that holding and to mitigate the risk of the disease spreading to other holdings. These controls are critical and are to the overall benefit of farmers. While much progress has been made in reducing bovine TB levels, I am concerned that previously observed downward trends in disease levels may have stalled. In an effort to deliver on my stated objective of eradicating bovine TB by 2030, government has approved the establishment of a TB Stakeholder Forum with an independent Chair who have been tasked with bringing forward proposals consistent with eradicating TB by 2030. I look forward to considering these proposals in due course.

In relation to compensation, a comprehensive regime is in place for herdowners who are affected by bovine TB, including compensation both for direct and indirect losses.

The primary compensation scheme for TB Affected herds is the On-Farm Market Valuation (OFMV) Scheme under which compensation is payable for cattle removed as reactors on the basis of the open market value, subject to certain ceiling limits. Herdowners with restricted and TB affected Herds may also qualify for supplementary payments under the Income Supplement and Hardship Grants Schemes subject to compliance with the relevant criteria.

Entitlement to compensation is conditional on herdowners complying with the provisions of National and EU legislative requirements and controls relating to animal welfare, disease, movement and identification.

There have been significant changes to the compensation package which were implemented in 2016 and I am satisfied that the current compensation arrangements provide a very significant range of financial supports to herdowners in a TB breakdown.

TB Eradication Scheme

1016. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the amount allocated to the TB eradication and support programme in each of the years 2010 to 2018; and the amount expended in each year and to date in 2018, in tabular form. [36945/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Following is a table setting out the actual expenditure from the Exchequer on the TB and Brucellosis eradication programmes from 2010 to date.

Year	Budget Allocation	Expenditure
2010	€55,090	€40,465
2011	€50,000	€39,799
2012	€40,000	€38,886
2013	€37,000	€31,739
2014	€35,300	€35,253
2015	€35,000	€30,251
2016	€32,400	€30,776
2017	€34,312	€32,570
2018*	€34,460	€24,105

*as at 03/09/18

As the cost of the eradication programme is significantly dependent on (i) the number of the reactors disclosed and (ii) the actual price of cattle in any given year – both of which may vary significantly - the budgetary allocation made available within the overall animal health and welfare area is managed to ensure sufficient funds are available to deliver the necessary programme measures. Please note that the reference point for budgetary planning for the eradication programmes is notionally set based on the outcome from the previous year.

Knowledge Transfer Programme

1017. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Ma-

rine the payment rates per hectare for farmers for the recently announced knowledge transfer scheme to establish knowledge transfer groups for forestry; when farmers will be able to apply to this scheme; and the criteria that will apply to applicants. [36946/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Knowledge Transfer Groups (KTG) are now well-established, with 19,000 farmers participating in agricultural KTG schemes, in various farming sectors. I was very pleased to recently add forestry to the sectors available for KT groups. Peer-to-peer learning is a key element of these groups and is a proven success.

KTGs involve groups of up to 20 forest owners, who meet at seven meetings or events. Events can include outdoor activities, such as visits to forests or sawmills, with a maximum of two events per group. KT facilitators, holding at a minimum a NFQ Level 8 qualification, liaise with KTG organisers, manage the learning events, select from various optional subjects and cover mandatory topics.

Applications are now open to KTG organisers to submit proposals to my Department, outlining the structure of the programme they are offering. Following the closing date on 14th September, those applications will be evaluated according to the scheme terms and conditions. Successful groups will then be invited to submit a Form 1 application, which seeks approval by the KTG organiser to establish a group. Those KTG organisers that are approved to establish a group will then seek forest owner participants.

The funding structure, following successful completion of the KTG's programme of meetings and events is:

- €70 per event, providing a minimum of four events have been attended to a maximum of seven, payable to each participant. The maximum payable is €490.

- €6,500 per KTG organised, payable to the KTG organiser.

Full details on how payments are made are in the scheme terms and conditions.

Form A applications, scheme terms and conditions and a list of approved KTG facilitators are currently available on my Department's website.

Food Exports

1018. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to the confirmation that 1,000 new customs and veterinary inspectors will be hired in the event of a no-deal hard Brexit scenario, the estimated impact in terms of resourcing for export certificates and health certificates required for third country exports in March 2019; and the contingencies in place for the necessary infrastructure to be of sufficient scale to allow for the seamless export of thousands of tonnes of food product to third countries weekly and to ensure there is no delays in this regard. [36947/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department is working through whole of Government structures, with other Departments, to prepare contingency plans for Brexit. From an agri food perspective, this will include arrangements and resources to apply any necessary import controls at ports and airports for products imported from the UK, and to provide any necessary export certification for animal and plant based products destined for the UK and to facilitate transit arrangements through the UK to the rest of the EU. These plans are at an advanced stage.

My Department is committed to supporting exporters and will continue to provide the appropriate certification for product destined for export markets, as and when such certification is required.

Farm Retirement Scheme Data

1019. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the amount allocated in each year of the 2014-2020 rural development programme to the early retirement scheme; the amount drawn down in each year and to date in 2018; the number of farmers that participated in the scheme; and his views on having such a scheme post-2020. [36948/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): At the start of the 2014 - 2020 Rural Development Programme there were 904 applicants in the scheme. The following table shows annual expenditure and allocation as requested.

In recent years the priority of my Department has shifted to the encouragement of generational change for farmers. The focus under the 2014 - 2020 Rural Development Programme is for an enhanced capital investment scheme for young trained farmers. This new Scheme provides grant aid at a rate of 60% of the cost of the investment, compared to the standard grant rate of 40%, and is an important support and encouragement to young farmers starting in agriculture for the first time. No decisions have been taken yet on schemes post-2020.

Early Retirement Scheme – Allocation and Expenditure 2014 – 2020

Year	Expenditure (€m)	Allocation (€m)
2014	10.522	10.636
2015	7.143	8.144
2016	4.248	4.602
2017	2.430	2.573
2018	0.663	0.886
2019	N/A	0.211
2020	N/A	N/A

Knowledge Transfer Programme

1020. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of knowledge transfer group participants that have and have not completed animal health measures, respectively, by county, in tabular form. [36949/18]

1021. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of knowledge transfer group participants that have and have not completed respectively farm improvement plans; and the number of knowledge transfer groups meetings that took place by the 31 July deadline by county, in tabular form. [36950/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1020 and 1021 together.

The detailed information requested is being gathered and I will be in contact with the Deputy shortly.

Brexit Data

1022. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 585 of 12 July 2018, the status of the data in relation to quarter one. [36951/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Brexit Loan Scheme opened on the 31st March 2018 and will remain open until 31st March 2020, or until it is fully subscribed. It is operated by the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) through the banks.

SBCI have informed my Department that the banks have reported the first official data on the Scheme and that this is currently being compiled into a report that will be made available shortly. In this regard they noted that the end of the first reportable quarter was 30 June and that the participating banks have a 45 day timeline within which they are required to report official data to the SBCI.

Fish Landings

1023. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the percentage of landings made from the UK exclusive economic zone for each specific fishing stock, in tabular form. [36952/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I have set out in a table the volume of each species landed by the Irish fishing fleet which was taken from the UK EEZ and the percentage this represents of overall Irish landings of that species. Figures have been compiled by the Marine Institute and are an average of landings from the period 2011-2015

Average Irish landings in the UK EEZ by volume (kilotonnes) value (millions of euro) for 2011-15

Stock	UK EEZ kt	% of tonnage
Mackerel	47.7	63.68%
Nephrops	3.7	40.13%
Horse mackerel	10.3	27.89%
Anglerfish	0.7	18.00%
Herring	8.7	31.32%
Megrim	0.7	22.94%
Edible crab	0.2	3.45%
Other species	0.7	8.14%
Scallops	1.1	42.02%
Whiting	1.4	22.55%
Blue whiting	0.3	2.27%
Hake	0.2	8.00%
Albacore	0.0	0.00%
Haddock	0.8	18.39%
Boarfish	6.3	17.56%
Cod	0.4	23.63%

Stock	UK EEZ kt	% of tonnage
Razor clams	0.0	5.36%
Sole	0.0	17.00%
Pollack	0.1	6.79%
Whelk	0.3	23.76%
European lobster	0.0	1.17%
European sprat	0.0	0.44%
Turbot	0.0	11.37%
Saithe	0.1	7.72%
Witch	0.1	21.12%
Lemon sole	0.1	17.49%
Rays and skates	0.3	23.28%
Ling	0.1	20.92%
Common shrimp	0.0	0.01%
Palaemonid shrimps nei	0.0	0.02%
John dory	0.0	19.29%
Plaice	0.1	19.35%
Squid	0.1	33.46%
Palinurid spiny lobsters nei	0.0	0.01%
Spinous spider crab	0.0	0.33%
Velvet swimcrab	0.0	0.30%
European flat oyster	0.0	0.76%
Brill	0.0	11.19%
Sharks, rays, skates, etc. nei	0.1	21.28%
Mussels	0.0	11.82%
Mulletts nei	0.0	0.44%
Atlantic bluefin tuna	0.0	7.27%
Pandalus	0.0	37.96%
Gurnards, searobins nei	0.0	21.62%
Surf clams nei	0.0	0.00%
Clams, etc. nei	0.0	0.99%
Penaeus shrimps nei	0.0	0.00%
European conger	0.0	33.58%
European pilchard(=Sardine)	0.1	16.81%
Swordfish	0.0	0.00%
Blackbelly rosefish	0.0	7.02%
Atlantic halibut	0.0	2.73%
Forkbeard	0.0	0.41%
Common periwinkle	0.0	12.01%
Nursehound	0.0	32.62%
Deep-sea red crab	0.0	0.00%
Horned and musky octopuses	0.0	9.04%
Green crab	0.0	0.01%
Common cuttlefish	0.0	80.28%

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Stock	UK EEZ kt	% of tonnage
Anchovy	0.0	18.04%
Solid surf clam	0.0	0.00%
Surmullet	0.0	17.53%
Red gurnard	0.0	15.43%
Common dab	0.0	24.76%
Sevenstar flying squid	0.0	39.16%
Flatfishes nei	0.0	31.97%
Wolffishes(=Catfishes) nei	0.0	9.34%
Cuttlefish	0.0	89.00%
Spiny lobsters nei	0.0	0.00%
Atlantic redfishes nei	0.0	0.31%
European seabass	0.0	68.20%
Sand gaper	0.0	1.68%
Octopuses nei	0.0	26.08%
Tusk	0.0	4.27%
Common mora	0.0	0.00%
Sand sole	0.0	23.34%
Wrasses, hogfishes, etc. nei	0.0	0.00%
Flat oysters nei	0.0	0.00%
Greenland halibut	0.0	0.00%
Flathead grey mullet	0.0	0.00%
Black sole	0.0	0.00%
Amer. plaice(=Long rough dab)	0.0	0.55%
Red mullet	0.0	51.53%
Pouting(=Bib)	0.0	20.20%
Redfish	0.0	0.00%
Pacific cupped oyster	0.0	0.00%
Breams	0.0	25.74%
Blue ling	0.0	0.00%
Ballan wrasse	0.0	0.00%
Common spiny lobster	0.0	0.00%
Threadfin rockling	0.0	0.00%
Swimming crabs, etc. nei	0.0	0.00%
Common octopus	0.0	16.36%
Sea cucumbers nei	0.0	0.00%
Orange roughy	0.0	17.39%
Smooth-hound	0.0	0.00%
Argentine	0.0	0.00%
Gadiformes nei	0.0	0.00%
Scorpionfishes nei	0.0	0.00%
Rabbit fish	0.0	0.00%
Moras nei	0.0	0.00%
Brown king crab	0.0	0.00%

Stock	UK EEZ kt	% of tonnage
Grand Total	84.9	32.92%

Fish Exports

1024. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the progress made on targets to increase fish exports in volume and value terms as per Foodwise 2025. [36953/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Food Wise 2025 has identified the seafood industry as one of the key drivers of export growth for Ireland's agri-food sector and the value of seafood exports reached €666 million in 2017, a 10% increase year-on-year. The main driver of export growth was Irish Organic Salmon increasing in value by 69% from €71 to €121 million. Other export products such as seaweed, shrimp, prawn and whiting also experienced strong growth. France is the most important market for exports accounting for over one quarter of the total value. The UK and Spain are the other top export partners both accounting for over 10% of total export value.

To assist our seafood processing sector in achieving its growth potential in the years ahead, and informed by Food Wise 2025, the Government is focussed on encouraging the sector to add value to fish raw material through increased innovation and development of new consumer products, encouraging the sector to further enhance its scale to make it more competitive on world markets, and encouraging the development and diversification of our export markets. My Department's European Maritime and Fisheries Fund Operational Programme is providing the development funding for these objectives and Bord Iascaigh Mhara is delivering these EMFF supports through the Seafood Innovation, Seafood Scaling and Seafood Capital Investment Schemes, while Bord Bia is significantly expanding its seafood promotion programme.

Renewable Energy Incentives

1025. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to amend the renewable electricity support scheme and enact a measure to encourage the use of renewable energy on farms; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35758/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The high level design of the new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) was approved by Government on 24 July 2018 and the scheme will now go forward for EU State Aid approval. The RESS has been designed to deliver Ireland's contribution towards an EU-wide renewable energy target of 32% out to 2030, within a competitive auction based, cost effective framework. The RESS will deliver a broader range of policy objectives including: the provision of pathways and supports for communities to participate in renewable energy projects; broadening the renewable electricity technology mix and increasing energy security, energy sustainability and ensuring the cost effectiveness of energy policy.

Key to the success of RESS will be the development of an enabling framework for community participation and this will be crucial to drive broader participation in Ireland's transition to a more decentralised and decarbonised electricity system.

Within this framework, there will be opportunities for farming communities to participate in the community-led category of RESS. Furthermore there will be obligations on developer-led

projects to offer mandatory investment opportunities to those living in proximity to these project looking for support under the RESS. My Department will engage further with all relevant stakeholders over the coming months on the detailed design of these community measures.

Furthermore, in July I launched a pilot support scheme for micro generation, targeting domestic customers and solar PV, with an emphasis on self-consumption and battery storage. Farm homes will be able to avail of this grant support to install solar PV panels on their roofs, thereby reducing their energy costs. The scheme will be subject to a six month review which will explore opportunities for broadening the scheme to include other technologies and to support other groups of users.

In addition to these opportunities, there are a number of other supports available to farmers under various schemes administered by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, including supports for solar PV for electricity production under the Pig and Poultry Investment Scheme (PPIS) as part of the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Schemes and supports for renewable heat technologies in the form of biomass boilers under the Young Farmer Capital Investment Scheme (YFCIS). In addition, air-source heat pumps are currently supported under the PPIS and YFCIS schemes and they may be used as part of a water heater under the Dairy Equipment Scheme.

Complimentary programmes like these delivered across a number of Government Departments are crucial in delivering our climate and energy ambitions as laid out in the National Development Plan and Project Ireland 2040. The Deputy will also appreciate that in developing and expanding renewable energy support schemes that a careful balance must be struck between the subsidy to renewable generators, whether they be large or small, and the additional costs to pay for these schemes that are transferred to electricity bill payers. Proposals for all such schemes are and must be subject to careful economic appraisal.

Inland Fisheries Ireland

1026. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if Inland Fisheries Ireland has plans to purchase a fishery (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36174/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): I have been informed by Inland Fisheries Ireland that it has no plans to purchase the fishery referred to by the Deputy.

I understand that the fishery is in private ownership and that there is no indication of any intention on the part of the owner to offer it for sale.

Waste Disposal Charges

1027. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the progress that has been made to introduce a payment to assist persons who have lifelong or long-term medical incontinence with the cost of disposing of incontinence products; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36755/18]

1032. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when an annual support of €75 for persons with lifelong, long-term medical incontinence under the waste management subvention scheme will be introduced. [35582/18]

1050. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when the annual support of €75 for medical incontinence wear promised in summer 2017 will be introduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36529/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1027, 1032 and 1050 together.

My Department is continuing the work of developing a mechanism to provide a €75 support for persons with lifelong or long-term medical incontinence to help meet the average annual cost of disposing of medical incontinence products. This process has unfortunately taken longer than envisaged, due to data protection issues that have arisen since the introduction of GDPR. However, I can assure the Deputy that I am committed to introducing the annual support as soon as practically possible in conjunction with relevant agencies and stakeholders.

In line with the commitments set out in *A Resource Opportunity - Waste Management Policy in Ireland*, published in 2012, and in the interest of encouraging further waste prevention and greater recycling, flat-rate fees for kerbside household waste collection are being phased out over the period autumn 2017 to autumn 2018, as customers contracts come up for renewal. The necessary regulatory steps have been put in place to give effect to this measure.

It is worth noting that this measure is not 'new' for about half of kerbside household waste customers, who are already on an incentivised usage pricing plan, i.e., a plan which contains a per lift or a weight related fee.

As announced in mid-2017, mandatory per kilogramme 'pay by weight' charging is not being introduced. Allowing for a range of charging options, which encourage householders to reduce and separate their waste, provides flexibility to waste collectors to develop various service-price offerings that suit different household circumstances.

The Price Monitoring Group has considered eleven months of data to date. While fluctuations in prices and service offerings have been observed, the overall trend is relative price stability.

Law Reform Commission Reports

1028. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the cost of creating the office of the digital safety commissioner as recommended by the Law Reform Commission has been costed. [35439/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Law Reform Commission Report on Harmful Communications and Digital Safety, published in 2016 recommended, inter alia, the establishment of an Office of the Digital Safety Commissioner of Ireland.

As the Deputy is aware, in February the Government did not oppose the passage at second stage of a Private Members Bill by Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire which seeks to establish an Office of the Digital Safety Commissioner. This Bill, the Digital Safety Commissioner Bill 2017, has been referred to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Communications, Climate Action and Environment by the Oireachtas.

The Action Plan for Online Safety was launched by the Taoiseach on 11 July and contains 25 actions to be implemented by the six sponsor Departments over the next 12-18 months. These actions cover a range of activities relevant to the proposed Office of the Digital Safety

Commissioner, including education and awareness raising, communicating with the public, and oversight and consultative structures. Action 18 of the plan commits the Government to working with the Joint Oireachtas Committee in relation to Deputy Ó Laoghaire's Bill.

The Bill raises jurisdictional and legal issues which will impact on the mandate, structure and costs of the proposed Office of the Digital Safety Commissioner. In advance of these issues being determined by the Oireachtas, it would not be feasible to set out costings. However, the Government will work with the Committee as it considers these matters in the context of its post Second Stage scrutiny.

National Broadband Plan

1029. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if there will be an ongoing subsidy required in terms of the national broadband plan tender; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35472/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The formal procurement process to select a company who will roll out a new high speed broadband network within the State Intervention Area under the National Broadband Plan (NBP) is in its final stages. The Intervention Area is depicted as Amber on my Department's High Speed Broadband Map available at www.broadband.gov.ie. The procurement process will identify the level of subsidy being sought by the bidder to support the roll out, operation and maintenance of the high speed broadband network in the State intervention area.

Departmental Contracts Data

1030. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the cost of the contracting out of secure printing by his Department in 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018. [35534/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The costs paid for internal printing in my Department during the years 2016, 2017 and to the end June 2018 are set out in the table below:

2016	2017	2018
€109,991	€120,946	€63,949

Broadband Service Provision

1031. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the position regarding broadband access at a location (details supplied) in County Wexford to encourage remote working; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35559/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The premises referred to by the Deputy is in the AMBER area on the High Speed Broadband Map which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie and is therefore included in the State Intervention Area under the National Broadband Plan.

My Department is in a formal procurement process to select a company who will roll out a new high speed broadband network in the State intervention area. That procurement process is

in its closing stages.

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.

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. The Department of Rural and Community Development maintain a list of Broadband Officers, a link to which is available on my Department's website at <https://www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/communications/topics/Broadband/national-broadband-plan/Pages/NBP-Information-Leaflets.aspx>

Question No. 1032 answered with Question No. 1027.

National Broadband Plan

1033. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the roll-out plan will be modified for a person (details supplied) and that person's neighbours; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35638/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The premises referred to by the Deputy are in the AMBER area on the High Speed Broadband Map which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie. They are therefore included in the State Intervention Area under the National Broadband Plan.

My Department is in a formal procurement process to select a company who will roll out a new high speed broadband network in the State intervention area. That procurement process is in its closing stages.

With regards to the Deputy's query on modification of roll out plans, any current deployment of telecommunications infrastructure in the area of the referred to premises is commercial in nature, and not part of the NBP State led intervention. Decisions made by private telecommunication operators relating to the roll out and siting of infrastructure to provide high speed broadband services throughout Ireland are undertaken on a commercial basis by competing service providers operating in a liberalised market. I have no statutory role or function to intervene in the commercial decisions of private operators, and therefore cannot direct operators regarding infrastructure installation or delivery of services.

As the premises referred to by the Deputy are in the State intervention area, therefore they will be included in roll out plans for that infrastructure deployment, the details of which will be available following conclusion of the procurement process.

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.

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. The Department of Rural and Community Development maintain a list of Broadband Officers, a link to which is available on my Department's website at <https://www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/communications/topics/Broadband/national-broadband-plan/Pages/NBP-Information-Leaflets.aspx>

National Broadband Plan

1034. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the timeframe for the roll-out of high-speed broadband for a person (details supplied) and that person's neighbours; the reason the estate in question has been singled out as not being commercial in view of the fact that the surrounding estates either have high-speed broadband or are on the proposed roll-out plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35639/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The premises referred to by the Deputy are in the AMBER area on the High Speed Broadband Map which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie. They are therefore included in the State Intervention Area under the National Broadband Plan.

My Department is in a formal procurement process to select a company who will roll out a new high speed broadband network in the State intervention area. That procurement process is in its closing stages.

With regard to the nature of the properties referred to by the Deputy, please note that the designation of premises as a commercial or non commercial area on the NBP High Speed Broadband Map is based on plans provided to my Department by commercial operators. Further to this, any deployment of telecommunications infrastructure in the area referred to by the Deputy is commercial in nature, and therefore not part of the planned State intervention network.

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

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.

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. The Department of Rural and Community Development maintain a list of Broadband Officers, a link to which is available on my Department's website at <https://www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/communications/topics/Broadband/national-broadband-plan/Pages/NBP-Information-Leaflets.aspx>

National Broadband Plan

1035. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his attention has been drawn to a submission by a club (details supplied) in County Kildare regarding the national broadband plan; the status of the plan in the context of another bidder withdrawing from the plan; the full cost to date of the plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35671/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I received a representation from the club referred to by the Deputy and a response to that representation has issued from my office. The club is in an AMBER area of the High Speed Broadband Map which is available at *www.broadband.gov.ie* and will therefore be served under the State led Intervention.

My Department is in a formal procurement process to select a company who will roll out a new high speed broadband network in the State intervention or AMBER area. That procurement process is in its closing stages.

Expenditure from 2013 to date by my Department with regard to the National Broadband Plan is €21,201,029, inclusive of VAT.

Broadband Service Provision

1036. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when improved broadband services will be provided to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35688/18]

1044. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when a person (details supplied) will be connected to broadband in an area in north County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36112/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1036 and 1044 together.

The eircodes referenced to by the Deputy fall within an AMBER area on my Department's High Speed Broadband Map which is available at *www.broadband.gov.ie*. They are therefore included in the State Intervention Area under the National Broadband PlanBP.

My Department is in a formal procurement process to select a company who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network in the State intervention area. That procurement process is its closing stages.

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.

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. The Department of Rural and Community Development maintain a list of Broadband Officers, a link

to which is available on my Department's website at <https://www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/communications/topics/Broadband/national-broadband-plan/Pages/NBP-Information-Leaflets.aspx>

National Broadband Plan

1037. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a reply will issue to a query raised in correspondence by a person (details supplied) regarding broadband in the person's area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35716/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The premises referred to by the Deputy is in an AMBER area on the High Speed Broadband Map which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie. It is therefore included in the State Intervention Area under the National Broadband Plan (NBP).

My Department is in a formal procurement process to select a company who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network in the State intervention area. That procurement process is now in its closing stages.

Any current deployment of telecommunications infrastructure in the referenced area is commercial in nature, and not related to the NBP State led intervention. Decisions made by private telecommunication operators relating to the rollout and siting of infrastructure to provide high speed broadband services throughout Ireland are undertaken on a commercial basis by competing service providers operating in a liberalised market. I have no statutory role or function to intervene in the commercial decisions of private operators, and therefore cannot direct operators regarding infrastructure installation or delivery of services.

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.

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. The Department of Rural and Community Development maintain a list of Broadband Officers, a link to which is available on my Department's website at <https://www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/communications/topics/Broadband/national-broadband-plan/Pages/NBP-Information-Leaflets.aspx>

Alternative Energy Projects

1038. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the ESB Westwave project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35813/18]

1039. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the funding received by the ESB Westwave project to date; the way in which this funding has been used to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35814/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1038 and 1039 together.

The WestWave project is a collaborative ocean energy project led by the ESB with the objective of accelerating the development of the ocean energy sector in Ireland. ESB is working with a number of wave energy project developers to realise this 5MW project.

Since 2003, the project has received exchequer funding of almost €780,000 including funding provided since 2009 from the Prototype Development Fund. This main focus of the Prototype Development Fund is to stimulate the development and deployment of ocean energy devices and systems. This funding has supported the overall objective of the WestWave project to demonstrate that wave energy projects can be designed, consented, developed and operated in Ireland, ultimately producing electricity to the grid. The WestWave project has established a site for a generic pre-commercial wave project off the west coast of Ireland, in Killard, Co. Clare.

Wave and tidal energy is still at the research, development and demonstration stage globally, and while promising experimental devices have been developed, much more research is required to bring wave energy technology to commercial viability. Consequently it has not yet been possible to confirm a date for a final investment decision or operation. I am advised that the earliest date for operation based on the current view of technology is 2025. ESB is investigating various sources of funding such as those provided by the European Investment Bank.

It is expected that wave energy technologies will play a part in our energy transition from the 2030's. The WestWave project is a highly innovative project and it is imperative that the technical solution chosen would be appropriate for the energetic wave conditions on the west coast of Ireland. The project represents a necessary step towards the development of, potentially, the world's first commercial wave energy array.

Telecommunications Services Provision

1040. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when the composite national coverage map for the 3G and 4G networks will be published; the action that will be taken to improve the service in these blackspot areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35974/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I recognise the frustration felt by communities where telecommunications networks are not always delivering the services people expect. Accordingly, I specifically included in the Programme for Government a commitment to a Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce. The Taskforce worked with key stakeholders to produce a report in December 2016, available on my Department's website, which contained 40 actions to alleviate some of the deficits. The Implementation Group I co-chair with Minister Kyne is overseeing implementation of the actions and comprises all key stakeholders responsible for delivery. This includes ComReg, which attends as both an action owner, and in an observer capacity in its role as the independent Regulator.

Action 31 of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce Implementation Review 2017, which Minister Kyne and I published on 21 February 2018, commits ComReg to developing and subsequently publishing on its consumer website a composite national coverage map, which will enable consumers across Ireland to make better informed decisions when choosing telecommunications service providers.

The composite national coverage map is due to be published by end Q4 2018.

In addition to the development of the national coverage map, a number of other initiatives are under way, which will address mobile coverage blackspots:

- My Department and the Department of Rural and Community Development have worked to achieve a greater consensus around site selection for telecoms infrastructure and therefore improve mobile phone coverage.

- Both Departments also worked with a pilot group of local authorities to identify the issues associated with mapping local blackspots. This pilot exercise has been completed, with all local authorities having been asked to map local blackspots and identify infrastructure that could potentially be used to provide additional coverage on an economic basis. This exercise is ongoing, and has been included in the 2018 Taskforce Work Programme. It is planned to have dedicated GIS resources in place to support this.

- A focus group was established to provide guidance with respect to categories of location where high quality reliable mobile coverage should be made available as a priority. The report of the focus group was published on my Department's website on 31 August 2018. It is anticipated that the output of the focus group should influence the actions of the mobile network operators in their work to reduce mobile phone blackspots. It will also inform future policy in my Department with regards to priorities for mobile phone services.

- A working group has been established with the remit of investigating the feasibility of developing standardised policy for accessing and utilising State and publicly-owned assets for the deployment of telecommunications infrastructure.

- In addition to its work on handset testing, following a consultation process, ComReg has also developed a licensing scheme which will enable households and businesses to use mobile phone repeaters to boost signals into their premises and bring immediate improvements in mobile coverage.

All of these initiatives should assist in enhancing the quality of mobile phone and data services, particularly in rural areas.

Household Waste Collection Price Monitoring Group

1041. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will report on the price monitoring group on residential household waste; the measures he is taking to ensure that the trend of increasing prices does not continue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35987/18]

1042. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the timeframe the price monitoring group on residential household waste will continue to operate; the plans in place should the group report a continuing steady increase across prices; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35988/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1041 and 1042 together.

I established a Household Waste Collection Price Monitoring Group (PMG) last year to monitor pricing developments for household waste collection services during the phasing out of flat rate fees. The PMG has met each month since September 2017 and has considered eleven months of pricing data trends. The PMG has indicated that, in the vast majority of cases to date, charges have remained stable. Detailed data on the price offerings for the months of De-

ember to July is available on www.dccae.gov.ie. The PMG was originally due to complete its work in June this year; however, I decided to extend the operation of the PMG to the end of the year to allow it to continue to monitor pricing developments. The operation of the PMG may be extended further if I, in conjunction with other relevant stakeholders, feel there is a need to continue to monitor pricing developments in the waste market.

The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) is also currently conducting a separate study on the operation of the household waste collection market which it will complete in 2018. The terms of reference set by the CCPC for the study are:

1. Research on Current Issues in the Waste Sector
2. An Economic Assessment of the Household Waste Collection Market
3. An Overview of Waste Collection in Other Countries
4. Recommendation

The on-going results from the PMG in conjunction with the study being undertaken by the CCPC will provide an evidence base for future policy decisions in relation to the household waste market.

Bituminous Fuel Ban

1043. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the initiatives under way and planned to promote the use of environmentally friendly fuels such as smokeless coal by households; the measures in place to prevent the use of harmful fuels in fireplaces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36050/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The ban on the marketing, sale and distribution of bituminous coal, or ‘the smoky coal ban’ as it is commonly known, was first introduced in Dublin in 1990, and subsequently extended to our major cities. Following a public consultation process, it was further extended in 2012, and now applies in 26 urban areas nationwide. The ban has proved very effective in reducing particulate matter and sulphur dioxide levels and has had the effect of significantly improving public health. Research indicates, for example, that the ban has resulted in over 350 fewer annual deaths in Dublin alone.

In light of its significant health benefits, I decided to extend the ban nationwide. This process necessarily involves discussion and consultation with a wide number of stakeholders, including with the European Commission, relevant Government Departments and Agencies and the residential fuel industry. Discussions with stakeholders on issues that may arise in connection with the proposed nationwide ban are underway.

Local Authorities, are primarily responsible for the enforcement of legislation on solid fuel including the ‘smoky coal’ regulations within their functional areas at present.

For householders who rely on solid fuel for heating, there is now a range of innovative low smoke solid fuel products, including low smoke coal products, available on the market. Low smoke solid fuel is cleaner and more energy-efficient. It can deliver improved air quality as well as human health benefits. Consumers should contact their solid fuel provider to clarify which of their products are low smoke and which are not.

In relation to cost, the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland has published figures com-

paring the respective costs of domestic fuels. These are available online at <https://www.seai.ie/resources/publications/Domestic-Fuel-Cost-Comparison-October-2017.pdf> and show that while low smoke fuels are typically more expensive to buy on a weight-by-weight basis, they have a higher heat output than coal or lignite nuggets.

Question No. 1044 answered with Question No. 1036.

Recycling Data

1045. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the quantity and percentage of plastics bottles that are verifiably recycled here in each of the past three years to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36296/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The EPA is the competent authority for the collation of national waste statistics and it reports annually on Ireland's performance against the recycling and recovery targets set out in the EU Packaging and Waste Packaging Directive. However, there is no specific target set for plastic bottles within the Directive and therefore data relating to plastic bottles is compiled in conjunction with data for all other plastic packaging items. Published recycling quantities and percentages for all packaging waste and for plastic packaging generated in Ireland for the last 3 reporting years, i.e. 2014-2016, is tabulated below.

-			Waste generated tonnes			Recycling tonnes			Recycling Percentage
WASTE	2014	2015	2016	2014	2015	2016	2014	2015	2016
All Packaging	969,423	983,384	991,298	662,158	664,119	663,791	68.3	67.5	67.0
Plastic Packaging	276,309	282,148	275,510	97,824	95,890	98,238	35.4	34.0	35.7

Although I do not have the quantity and percentage of plastics bottles that were recycled in Ireland in each of the past three years, the EPA is currently finalising a national waste characterisation study, which is due for completion by the end of 2018, and this will provide a more comprehensive analysis of this and other waste streams.

Repak, the national packaging compliance scheme, which manages the collection and recycling of approximately 80% of all packaging on the Irish market, reported the following to me for their membership:

Plastic Bottle Recycling

	2014	2015	2016
Repak Members Tonnes Placed on the Market	32,914	35,664	39,466
Repak Recycled Tonnes	26,359	23,660	27,092

% Recycling Rate of Repak Member Tonnes	80%	66%	69%
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Recycling Policy

1046. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the requirements placed on employers to ensure that with respect to waste generated by their staff in the workplace recycling is maximised and residual waste is minimised; the locations such requirements are published; the way in which they are enforced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36297/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Waste management in Ireland is primarily regulated under the Waste Management Act, 1996. Section 32 of that Act requires any person who produces waste to ensure that the waste is managed appropriately, including through arranging for the collection of the waste by an authorised operator. The waste hierarchy is defined in section 21A and establishes a priority order which is the cornerstone of both EU and national waste management legislation and policy, whereby prevention, preparing for reuse, recycling and other recovery of waste are prioritised over the disposal of waste. Supplementary secondary legislation such as the Waste Management (Food Waste) Regulations, 2009, together with specific local authority bye-laws, all reflect the waste hierarchy and complete the legislative framework in this regard. The inspectorate staff of the local authorities and/or the Environmental Protection Agency is charged with oversight. Notwithstanding the above, employers, indeed all waste producers, are encouraged and supported to prevent waste. My Department currently supports the following workplace initiatives:

- The EPA's Green Business programme offers a free service that helps business identify savings through waste prevention and reducing water and energy use. The service includes advice on how to build staff engagement in successful environmental management;

- The EPA's Green Teams Recognition Scheme (www.greenteams.org) has developed formal accredited training for workplace green teams; and

- The three Regional Waste Management Planning Offices are working directly with business and Local Enterprise Offices to improve environmental behaviours in the work place.

My Department has also funded a range of measures to support better recycling at household level which is equally applicable to the workplace, including:

- recyclinglistireland.ie – promoting a standardised list of items that can be put in the recycling bin;

- a 'Master Recycling' programme which is being rolled out to 650 workshops nationwide; and

- www.brownbins.ie - shows the public how to use the brown bin properly.

Waste Management

1047. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the agencies and-or authorities that have responsibility for national campaigns

on waste minimisation, prevention and general information for the public on these matters; the recent steps taken in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36298/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): My department works in partnership with the Environmental Protection Agency and the local authority regional waste management offices on a range of national waste prevention and minimisation measures. The National Waste Prevention Programme (NWPP) is funded by my department and led by the EPA. The NWPP has been operating since 2004 and delivers a suite of initiatives and supports to reduce wasteful consumption of material, water and energy resources by changing behaviours in businesses, farms, households and the public sector. For businesses, it delivers programmes that stimulate resource efficiency and the circular economy. The 2017 Annual Report which details the programme's activities and achievements was published in recent months and is available at http://www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/waste/prevention/reports/EPA_NWPP_Ministers%20Report%202017_web.pdf.

Waste prevention at regional and local level is a collaboration between Regional Waste Management Offices and local authorities. Local authorities fund the operation and staffing of their respective Offices in addition to an annual grant from my department.

Each of the Regional Waste Management Offices has a full time Waste Prevention Officer who is dedicated to delivery of local waste prevention measures and works with key local authority staff such as Environmental Awareness Officers.

The Regional Waste Management Offices are engaged in a number of current public information campaigns on waste minimisation and prevention, including:

- recyclinglistireland.ie – a standardised list of items that can go into the recycling bin;
- A 'Master Recycling' programme, in partnership with environmental NGOs, is being rolled out to 650 workshops nationwide;
- A dedicated website, www.brownbins.ie, to show the public how to use the brown bin properly and reduce food waste; and
- Reuse Month – an annual nationwide campaign in October to promote reuse amongst householders and businesses.

Further information on the work being undertaken by the three Regional Waste Management Offices is available at:

<http://www.curwmo.ie/>

<http://emwr.ie/>

<http://southernwasteregion.ie/>

Departmental Communications

1048. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the position in his Department and the organisations under its aegis that have arrangements in place for lo-call numbers or 1800, 1850 and 1890 phone numbers for members of the public to contact his Department or organisations under its aegis; the number of these that are completely free to call to persons that use mobile phones and may incur major bills phoning such organisations; if the situation will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the

matter. [36394/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): My Department operates a 1890 LoCall option (1890 44 99 00), along with its standard telephone access line (01-6782000), which allows members of the public who wish to call my Department's offices to choose the option most suited to their circumstances. Details of these telephone numbers, together with advice that the rates charged for LoCall numbers may vary among service providers, appear on my Department's website. These contact details are also displayed on Departmental correspondence and publications. The cost of calls to these telephone numbers will be reflective of the rates charged by the caller's service provider.

The information requested in relation to the agencies under the aegis of my Department is an operational matter for each agency, and my Department will request the relevant bodies to reply directly to the Deputy in the matter.

Postal Services Provision

1049. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans in relation to a facility (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36479/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): It must be stated that the operation of mail centres is an operational matter for An Post and not one in which I, as Minister, have any direct function. Nonetheless, I have been monitoring the situation with mail centres carefully and I have asked An Post to keep me fully informed on this issue.

Question No. 1050 answered with Question No. 1027.

Waste Management

1051. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the specific actions and their associated timeframe he is taking to deal with the excessive waste generated by single use plastic products; the annual reduction targets for single use plastic products envisaged; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36530/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): On 28 May 2018, the EU Commission published a proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the reduction of the impact of certain plastic products on the environment. This draft legislation proposes new EU-wide rules to target the 10 most prevalent single-use plastic (SUP) products found on Europe's beaches and seas, as well as lost and abandoned fishing gear, which together account for 70% of all marine litter. The proposal includes:

- proposed bans on certain plastic products, including, cotton buds, plastic cutlery and straws;

- setting targets for both reducing the use of certain plastics (including coffee cups) and the collection of certain SUPs such as plastic drinks bottles;

- placing obligations on producers of SUP items to help cover the costs of their waste management and clean up through the establishment of extended producer responsibility (EPR)

schemes.

The full text of the legislative proposal which sets out all the measures contained therein is available at the following link:

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/circular-economy/pdf/single-use_plastics_proposal.pdf

The Commission has indicated that this proposal should be treated as a priority by the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers in order to deliver tangible results within a short timeframe.

Nationally, I am engaging in a range of initiatives, including commissioning a study to explore how we can achieve the 90% target for plastic bottles sought by the Commission in the proposed SUP Directive. I am cognisant, however, that the Commission has warned of the risk of market fragmentation when Member States take measures in an uncoordinated manner, which differ in scope, focus and ambition level. Therefore, my immediate focus is to work closely with the Commission and my EU counterparts to ensure this proposed Directive is progressed as soon as possible.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

1052. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the amount by which Ireland will fail to meet the 2020 greenhouse gas emission targets (details supplied); the level of fines budgeted for 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36531/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I refer to the answer to Questions Nos. 1004, 1007 and 1023 of 12 June 2018. Ireland's commitments under the second period of the Kyoto Protocol, (2013-2020), will be discharged via the 2009 EU Effort Sharing Decision 406/2009/EC (ESD). The ESD established annual emission limits for the period 2013 to 2020 for each EU Member State. For the year 2020 itself, the target set for Ireland is that emissions should be 20% below their value in 2005. This is jointly the most demanding 2020 reduction target allocated under the ESD, and one shared only by Denmark and Luxembourg. The latest projections of greenhouse gas emissions, published by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in May 2018, indicate that emissions from those sectors of the economy covered by the ESD could be between 0% and 1% below 2005 levels by 2020.

While this is very disappointing, it is not surprising given the recent pace of economic growth, and the consequent increases in emissions from the agriculture and transport sectors in particular. The projected shortfall to our targets is further exacerbated by both the constrained investment capacity over the past decade due to the economic crisis, and the extremely challenging nature of the target itself. In fact, it is now accepted that Ireland's 2020 target was not consistent with what would be achievable on an EU wide cost-effective basis.

The ESD includes a number of flexibility mechanisms to enable Member States to meet their annual emissions targets, including provisions to bank any excess allowances to future years and to trade allowances between Member States. Using banked emissions allocations from the period to 2015, Ireland is projected to comply with its emissions reduction targets in each of the years 2013 to 2017. However, cumulative emissions are projected to exceed annual targets for 2018, 2019 and 2020, which will result in a requirement to purchase additional allowances. While this purchasing requirement is not, at this stage, expected to be significant, further analysis is ongoing to quantify the likely costs involved, in light of the final amount and

price of allowances required.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

1053. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the roll out of the national broadband plan; and if his attention has been drawn to the fact that businesses in counties Cavan and Monaghan are suffering, students cannot access high speed Internet in many areas to complete their studies and public services are also impacted due to poor broadband service. [36578/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): There are approximately 42,000 premises in Cavan. Approximately 17,000 (40%) fall within the AMBER area of the High Speed Broadband Map which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie and will therefore be served under the State led Intervention. Approximately 20,000 (49%) premises are in a BLUE area and will be served by commercial providers, while approximately 5,000 (11%) are LIGHT BLUE and fall to be served by eir's planned rural deployment. Of the approximately 32,800 premises in Monaghan, approximately 15,600 (48%) are in the AMBER area, approximately 15,500 (47%) are in BLUE and approximately 1,700 (5%) are in LIGHT BLUE area.

Information on the categories of specific premises can be accessed on my Department's website www.broadband.gov.ie by entering the relevant eircode.

Information on eir's rural deployment is available at <http://fibrerollout.ie>. A copy of the Commitment Agreement underpinning eir's rural deployment plan is available on my Department's website www.dccae.gov.ie. eir continue to pass premises as part of this deployment. As of Q2 2018, eir passed more than 5,600 premises in Cavan and over 3,200 premises in County Monaghan with further premises to be passed as part of the rollout in these counties.

My Department is in a formal procurement process to select a company who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network in the State intervention area. That procurement process is now in its closing stages.

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. 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. The Department of Rural and Community Development maintain a list of Broadband Officers, a link to which is available on my Department's website at <https://www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/communications/topics/Broadband/national-broadband-plan/Pages/NBP-Information-Leaflets.aspx>

Renewable Energy Projects

1054. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the upcoming renewable electricity supported scheme will include technology

specific auctions in particular to enable development of solar photovoltaic generation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36614/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The high level design of the new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) was approved by Government in July 2018 and the scheme will now proceed through the EU State Aid approval process. It is expected that the first renewable electricity auctions will take place under RESS in 2019. The RESS has been designed to deliver Ireland's contribution towards an EU-wide renewable energy target of 32% out to 2030, within a competitive auction-based, cost effective framework. The RESS will deliver a broad range of policy objectives including: the provision of pathways and supports for communities to participate in renewable energy projects; broadening the renewable electricity technology mix and increasing energy security, energy sustainability and ensuring the cost effectiveness of energy policy.

The scheme will provide for a renewable electricity (RES-E) ambition of up to a maximum of 55% by 2030 subject to determining the cost effective level which will be set out in the draft National Energy and Climate Plan.

The new scheme will be defined by a series of renewable electricity auctions, where the most cost effective projects within an auction structure will receive financial support in the form of a premium, in addition to the price they receive from the market. In addition to this competitive, cost effective framework, the use of certain 'levers' such as near term delivery dates and 'single technology caps', will accelerate the broadening of the renewable technology mix, particularly in light of falling costs for a number of renewable technologies.

An important consideration in developing and expanding renewable energy support schemes is that a careful balance must be struck between the subsidy to renewable generators, whether they be large or small, and the additional costs to pay for these schemes that are transferred to electricity bill payers. Proposals for all such schemes must be subject to robust economic appraisal.

Finally, in July I launched a pilot support scheme for micro generation, targeting domestic customers and solar PV, with an emphasis on self-consumption and battery storage.

North-South Interconnector

1055. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the reason he is delaying publishing the studies in relation to the North-South interconnector; the timeframe for publication; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36658/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): In 2017 I commissioned two studies designed to address the main points of the motions passed in Dáil and Seanad Éireann as well as key concerns expressed by the parties opposed to the development of the North South Interconnector as an overhead line. The first is an independent study to examine the technical feasibility and cost of undergrounding the interconnector. The second study is focused on the levels of compensation provided to land and property owners in proximity to high-voltage transmission lines in a European context. Both studies are now completed and have been submitted to me. I expect to bring both reports to Government in the coming weeks and will publish them as soon as possible thereafter.

Postal Codes

1056. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will address a matter raised in correspondence (details supplied) regarding an Eircode issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36753/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Eircodes are assigned to new property addresses using a valid postal address and verified geo-location. When a new address is created, for example by a new build or a re-development, An Post GeoDirectory maps this new address and issues an updated version of their GeoDirectory database file to Capita Business Support Services Ireland, trading as Eircode, in accordance with their licence agreement. This is done on a quarterly basis. Each new address assigned an Eircode is then published on the free to use Eircode Finder website and a notification letter is issued to the occupant containing the Eircode of that address. I understand that the premises in question received that Eircode at the start of August 2018. The timeframe for the updated Eircodes to be made accessible to telecommunications companies is a separate process. This is dependent on the contracted agreement each company has with an Eircode data provider, which feeds in new Eircodes at regular intervals. All such Eircode data providers are sourced and contracted by individual telecommunications companies. Once telecommunications companies have new Eircodes in their databases, they should then be in a position to deal with requests to connect customers to their high speed broadband network.

My department understands that the difficulties in this case, as outlined in the correspondence attached to the Question, relate to internal process issues in the company concerned. Operational matters and commercial decisions of private commercial operators, including the updating of their internal databases with new Eircodes, are a matter for these commercial operators and one in which I have no direct function.

North-South Interconnector

1057. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when his Department received the two independent reports relating to the proposed North-South interconnector; when it is planned to publish these reports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36757/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): In 2017 I commissioned two studies designed to address the main points of the motions passed in Dáil and Seanad Éireann as well as key concerns expressed by the parties opposed to the development of the North South Interconnector as an overhead line. The first is an independent study to examine the technical feasibility and cost of undergrounding the interconnector. The second study is focused on the levels of compensation provided to land and property owners in proximity to high-voltage transmission lines in a European context. Both studies are now completed and have been submitted to me. I expect to bring both reports to Government in the coming weeks and will publish them as soon as possible thereafter.

Biofuel Availability

1058. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans for the development of anaerobic digestors on a regional basis. [36765/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The REFIT3 support scheme, which is funded by the public service obligation paid by electricity consumers, has supported the development of anaerobic digestion facilities via a high-efficiency combined heat and power tariff. This scheme closed for new applications on 31 December 2015.

The Support Scheme for Renewable Heat will provide an operational support for the heat output of anaerobic digestion heating systems. This scheme was approved by Government in December 2017. The operational support is planned to open by the end of 2018, subject to state aid clearance from the EU Commission. The National Development Plan sets out an indicative resource allocation of €300 million for the rollout of the scheme for the period 2018-2027.

Electricity output from anaerobic digesters will be eligible for support under the forthcoming Renewable Electricity Support Scheme. This scheme was approved by Government in July 2018 and will also require state aid approval.

In addition, my Department continues to examine potential options to support biomethane grid injection. If introduced, such a support would incentivise the upgrading of biogas (produced from anaerobic digestion) to biomethane and its injection into the natural gas grid.

The Support Scheme for Renewable Heat and Renewable Electricity Support Scheme will be available nationally and therefore provide the potential to benefit all regions.

National Broadband Plan Administration

1059. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the national broadband plan in terms of the procurement process; the expected roll-out terms, timeframe and completion dates for the remaining homes and businesses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36781/18]

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 is being achieved via a combination of commercial investment and a State led intervention.

My Department is in a formal procurement process to select a company who will roll out a new high speed broadband network in the State intervention area. That procurement process is in its closing stages. Details of deployment plans for the State intervention area will be available following conclusion of the procurement process.

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.

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. The Department of Rural and Community Development maintain a list of Broadband Officers, a link to which is available on my Department's website at <https://www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/commu->

Energy Infrastructure

1060. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when a project (details supplied) will be progressed in view of the fact that such infrastructure would be beneficial for a town needing job creation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36784/18]

1061. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his Department has contact with their counterparts in Northern Ireland relating to the development of a project (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36785/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1060 and 1061 together.

The routing of gas pipelines or the connection of towns to the gas pipeline network are matters for Gas Networks Ireland, a commercial State-sponsored body under the aegis of the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, and the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU), the statutorily independent energy regulator, which conducts consultations on its regulatory decisions.

In relation to bringing gas supply to any new town, such towns are evaluated in accordance with the criteria in the Connections Policy as approved and published by the CRU. This means that the cost-benefit for the connection needs to be positive i.e. the expected revenues over a period of time must exceed the projected costs for the project to be viable. The Connections Policy appraises both domestic and industrial/commercial demand, and so proximity to a major pipeline and a large industrial/commercial gas load tend to be the most significant factors in town appraisals.

The last assessment of this region concluded that it is not economically viable to connect Ballyconnell, or any other areas in Co. Cavan. However, this outcome may change in the future depending on the emergence of significant new demand for gas connections in the locality. I note that the “Gas to the West” project in Northern Ireland is now well into the construction stage, as regards both the high-pressure, cross-country, pipeline and the intermediate-pressure distribution pipelines.

To address the question as to whether network extensions, where economically feasible and in line with our energy policy, could contribute to regional and rural development, I commissioned a study last year on the wider costs and benefits of gas network extensions, to include possible climate and decarbonisation aspects, as well as regional and rural development benefits. As advised to the information seminar organised for stakeholders on the study in January, the study was for the purpose of technical evaluation, analysis and information-gathering. It has since been completed. The results of the study will be presented to me by the consultants in the coming weeks, with a view to developing next steps to inform and feed into future policy development.

Electric Vehicles

1062. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action

and Environment when it is expected fast charge points for electric vehicles will be installed in Cavan town; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36812/18]

1064. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to install fast charge points for electric vehicles in towns throughout counties Cavan and Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36830/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1062 and 1064 together.

There are currently charging posts at five locations in County Cavan, including two in Cavan Town. As each charging post consists of two charging points, this gives a total of ten charging points in the county. There are also charging posts at five locations consisting of a total of ten charging points in County Monaghan. In addition, there is a fast charging station located in Monaghan Town.

The *National Policy Framework: Alternative Fuels Infrastructure for Transport in Ireland 2017 to 2030* sets out the need for electric vehicle charging in Ireland. Although the existing capacity of the public charging network is considered adequate, development of infrastructure to meet the growing demand is necessary.

The majority of the existing network of publicly accessible charge points was rolled out by the ESB through its eCars programme. This network includes over 70 fast chargers, mainly on national routes. A map showing the locations of charging points throughout Ireland is available at <https://www.esb.ie/our-businesses/ecars/charge-point-map> .

A key aspect of the work of the Low Emission Vehicle Taskforce, co-chaired by my Department and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, involves examining how best to support the development of the public charging network. The first phase of the Taskforce's work, which focuses on electric vehicles, is nearing completion and has led to an expansion in the supports available for the provision of effective and efficient electric vehicle charging.

In July, I announced the first Call for Applications for the Climate Action Fund which is one of the four funds established under the *National Development Plan 2018-2027* as part of *Project Ireland 2040*. The Climate Action Fund will provide at least €500 million to support initiatives that contribute to the achievement of Ireland's climate and energy targets over the next decade. This Call for Applications focuses on funding larger scale projects that are scheduled to commence development in 2019 or 2020. Local infrastructure projects including the provision of electric vehicle charging networks will be eligible to apply. Further information can be found on my Department's website.

Funding for public charging in local communities can also be accessed through the Better Energy Communities Scheme. The scheme, which is administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, supports community based partnerships to improve the energy efficiency of homes, businesses and community facilities in a local area.

Although I cannot provide a timeline for the provision of additional fast chargers in counties Cavan and Monaghan at this point, I expect the supports that are in place, and further proposals that I intend to bring forward later this year, will increase the availability of publically accessible electric vehicle charging.

Post Office Network

1063. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the measures he plans to implement to secure the post office network in view of its importance throughout the country with particular reference to the needs of rural communities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36826/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): As Minister, I am responsible for the postal sector including the governance of An Post. I am acutely conscious of the value placed by communities in both rural and urban areas on services provided by post offices and am committed to ensuring that a sustainable post office network is available to all our citizens for the medium and for the long term. The post office network has been facing many challenges for some years now with a continuing decline in transaction numbers primarily driven by the move to online payments and online banking, as well as eSubstitution. Standing still is not an option for the network.

In April this year An Post announced a renewed vision for the post office network which centres around the availability of new services in a modernised, revitalised network. The announcement was supported by an agreement reached between An Post and the Irish Postmasters Union (IPU) executive following months of intensive negotiations, and was subsequently endorsed by 80% of IPU members. In its negotiations with An Post, Postmasters sought both the modernisation of the network and a voluntary redundancy package for those who wanted to leave the business.

The agreement represents a necessary first step in reinvigorating our national post office network and making it a viable sustainable, modern and vibrant network for the future, capable of adapting to the changing environment in which it operates by providing a service that meets the needs of communities across the country, particularly in rural areas.

As part of its strategy for modernising the post office network, An Post has established a dedicated business unit within An Post, An Post Retail. Additional services that An Post propose to introduce through the network include a better range of Government services, financial services and e-commerce services for shoppers and small businesses. There is already a rapid expansion of banking services happening with the Smart Current Account and enhanced foreign exchange facilities. Post offices will have credit card services and will be able to provide loans to small business and personal loans. An Post is committed to ensuring that our post offices will be equipped with the range of services that will attract and retain footfall but these measures are meaningless unless the public use the services provided. Key to the survival of this renewed network is the willingness of all citizens to use it.

Government business is the backbone of the network. In April this year the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection renewed her Department's contract with An Post to provide pensions, child benefit and other social welfare payments at post offices.

While Government policy is to offer Government services online, there is always likely to be a segment of the population that is not comfortable or proficient accessing online tools or services. The post office network is the obvious choice as the "offline gateway" for citizens with its nationwide network and existing strong relationship with offline citizens. Government funding of €80,000 has been allocated to roll a pilot scheme for Digital Assist which will see 10 post offices equipped to help citizens with online Government interactions. The 10 pilot schemes are being currently rolled out in rural post offices.

In addition, I have secured Government approval to explore how further services might be made available to our "offline citizens". This would be delivered via a centralised procurement framework. A Working Group comprising representatives across Government Departments is to be established to consider this issue and will report back by the end of year.

Question No. 1064 answered with Question No. 1062.

Motor Insurance

1065. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a resolution in the case of a person (details supplied) can be identified. [35448/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): My reply to your previous question on this matter (PQ Ref 12358/18) set out the requirements for an application for a Motor Dealer Identity code. That reply referred to the special ‘dispensations’ motor dealers can avail of when granted this identity code. Accordingly, my Department must be satisfied that any application for Motor Identity codes meets all the requirements, including copy of a premises rateable valuation receipt, or planning permission for such premises granted under the Local Government (Planning and Development) Act 1963.

It should be noted that this process is in line with requirements by the Revenue Commissioners for authorised motor dealers, and also what is requested by a Licensing Authority in the issue of a Motor Trade Licence.

I understand that an official from my Department has communicated this verbally, and in writing, to the person whose details you have supplied.

Military Aircraft Landings

1066. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his Department was notified in advance by the embassy of the United States of an aircraft (details supplied) being on contract to the United States military; and the origin of the flight in view of the fact that there is no air base in Roswell with the code ROS. [35500/18]

1076. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if an application was made for a flight (details supplied) for exemptions for the transportation of munitions or weapons of war through Shannon Airport to date in 2018 under the Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Order, SI 224 of 1973; and the origin of the flight in view of the fact there is no air base in Roswell with the code ROS. [35499/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1066 and 1076 together.

The aircraft in question was a Boeing 767 operated by Cargojet Airways Limited.

It arrived in Shannon from Roswell International (ROW) on the 3rd of July 2018 and departed to Tel Aviv, Israel on the 4th of July following a crew rest period.

No application for an exemption for the carriage of munitions of war was made to my Department.

Suicide Prevention

1067. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the new bridge under construction in New Ross will include suicide prevention apparatus such as suicide barriers and netting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36477/18]

7 September 2018

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 (TII) 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 do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Driver Test Data

1068. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the details of each driver test centre nationally; the number of persons waiting for a driver test; the expected waiting time for persons applying for a test at each centre; the longest time that a person on the waiting list has been waiting to be offered a test at each centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36642/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): This is a matter for the Road Safety Authority. I have referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response is not received within 10 days.

Bus Éireann Services

1069. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a matter (details supplied) in relation to the change in Bus Éireann's timetable for daily services from Cavan to Dublin will be examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35423/18]

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

Bus Éireann Services

1070. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a matter in relation to the carriage of a mobility scooter on buses by a person (details supplied) will be examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35432/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The matter referred to by the Deputy is an issue coming under the remit of the transport operator, in this case Bus Éireann.

I have therefore forwarded your question to Bus Éireann for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Dublin Bus Fleet

1071. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the National Transport Authority, NTA, is proposing a

new colour scheme for buses in Dublin which would be dark blue on the front and back and that persons with visual impairments are concerned that this colour scheme will make the buses much less visible; if there has or will be public consultation in relation to this change; and if he has had discussions with the NTA, in relation to this change. [35447/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the development and implementation of public transport in the Greater Dublin Area, including the development of a single brand to be used by all public transport operators providing services in accordance with a public transport services contract with the NTA.

Under the BusConnects programme the NTA are proposing a new, fresh and modern look for the bus system by introducing a redesigned bus livery, which will also accommodate the potential of additional operators providing bus services as part of the overall network.

The NTA held a public consultation on the proposed new livery in October 2017 and I am aware that it has also recently engaged with the National Disability Authority and other key stakeholders in this regard. Given the NTA's responsibility in the matter I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for a more detailed reply following completion of that process.

Dormant Accounts Fund

1072. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the way in which clubs or organisations can apply for the dormant accounts funding, namely the sports measures for disadvantaged communities to support the national physical activity plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35460/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The legislation governing Dormant Accounts requires that funds from that source may only be used to fund programmes or projects which would assist:

- the personal and social development of persons who are economically or socially disadvantaged;
- the educational development of persons who are educationally disadvantaged; or
- persons with a disability.

In order to ensure an effective, efficient and targeted approach towards adherence to these eligibility criteria, Sport Ireland periodically invites applications for possible projects and programmes from the National Governing Bodies, Local Sports Partnerships and other agencies directly involved with disadvantage and disability. Proposals considered to be consistent with the eligibility criteria can then be submitted by those entities to Sport Ireland for appraisal. Individual sports clubs or organisations should accordingly liaise directly with their relevant Local Sports Partnership or National Governing Body.

Driver Test Waiting Lists

1073. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason a person (details supplied) is waiting since 6 January 2018 for an appointment for their driver test in Tullamore; when he or she can expect to be called; and the measures being taken

to reduce the waiting time at the test centre in Tullamore. [35482/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): This is a matter for the Road Safety Authority. I have referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response is not received within 10 days.

Rail Services Provision

1074. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the additional capacity that can be added to the existing services on the Maynooth to Connolly rail line in the second half of 2019 arising from the refurbishment of existing rolling stock that can be put into service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35490/18]

1104. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the procurement of additional carriages on the rail fleet which will serve the Pelletstown station when complete as part of the Maynooth to Connolly stations service will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36092/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1074 and 1104 together.

As the Deputies are aware, the National Transport Authority (NTA), working with other relevant State bodies such as in this instance Iarnród Éireann, is responsible for ensuring the planning and delivery of the public transport infrastructure priorities in the GDA. This includes the electrification of the Maynooth line, as part of the DART Expansion Programme, as well as the refurbishing of existing and the purchasing of new railway stock in the context of increased capacity and services.

Therefore, in light of the NTA's role, I have forwarded the Deputies' questions to the NTA for further response.

Road Network

1075. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will address a matter regarding the upgrading of a road (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35494/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of the relevant County or City Council, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the Council's own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the Council.

Prior to the financial crisis, applications for funding for projects such as Dale Road would have been considered as part of the Specific Improvement Grant Scheme for regional and local roads. However, the extent of the cutbacks in grant funding during the crisis meant this grant scheme had to be curtailed after 2013 because expenditure on maintenance/renewal was falling well short of what was required to adequately maintain the regional and local road network.

The NDP does provide for the gradual build up in funding for the road network but it will take some years yet to reach the level required for the adequate maintenance and renewal of the network. For this reason there is limited scope at present for funding projects under the Specific

Grant Programme.

Any projects proposed by local authorities for consideration under the Specific Grant Programme are assessed by the Department on a case-by-case basis. All projects put forward by local authorities for consideration must comply with the requirements of the Public Spending Code and my Department's Capital Appraisal Framework and it is important for local authorities to prioritise projects within their overall area of responsibility with these requirements in mind.

As required under the capital project appraisal process Kerry County Council has submitted a Preliminary Appraisal in relation to the upgrade of this road. Once that appraisal is assessed, taking into account other competing projects and the overall roads budget, my Department will respond to Kerry County Council.

Question No. 1076 answered with Question No. 1066.

Railway Stations

1077. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 11 of 15 February 2018, the status of the expansion of the car parking capacity levels at Sallins and Naas railway train station; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35521/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware and as outlined in my reply last February, the National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure and services in the Greater Dublin Area. Iarnród Éireann receive Exchequer funding via the NTA in relation to the provision of car parking at train stations on the heavy rail network including Sallins and Naas railway station.

In light of the NTA's responsibility in this area, I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for further update and direct reply.

Rail Network

1078. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of plans for the upgrading of rail service levels through the Phoenix Park tunnel during off-peak times; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35522/18]

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

Departmental Expenditure

1079. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the cost of the contracting out of secure printing in his Department in 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018. [35532/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The cost for contracting out secure printing in my Department is contained in the table below,

Year	Tax Discs	VRCs	Licensing Paper
2016	€440,001.84	€164,702.92	7933.5
2017	€411,782.16	€37,198.33	2238.6
To date in 2018	€183,027.21	€111,279.54	5399.7

Marine Safety

1080. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if assistance can be provided in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35566/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The MCIB was set up under the Merchant Shipping (Investigation of Marine Casualties) Act, 2000 to investigate marine casualties and publish reports of such investigations. Under Section 8 of the Act, the MCIB is established as being independent of the Minister in the performance of its functions, and in general is independent of any other person or body whose interest could conflict with the functions of the Board.

The purpose of an investigation is to establish the cause or causes of a marine casualty, with a view to making recommendations for the avoidance of similar marine casualties. Under the Act, it is specifically not the purpose of an investigation to attribute blame or fault.

All investigations of casualties are carried out by the Board's panel of external investigators. The panel consists of personnel holding technical qualifications such as naval architects, marine engineers or deck officers and reflects broad based maritime competence and experience. The process is very thorough and involves a variety of professional bodies, including the Gardaí, the Irish Coastguard, Met Eireann and the RNLI before completion and submission to the Board.

Following its investigation, the MCIB makes its recommendations. In this case, the recommendations included the undertaking of a highly visible information poster campaign on piers and launching areas relating to life jackets, VHF radio and emergency contact details and in particular the importance of the need to wear a PFD (Personal Flotation Device) in order to improve the chance of survival when an accident occurs.

A number of actions were taken by my Department to support these recommendations including the issuing of two marine notices relating to the use of PFDs. Furthermore, the Marine Safety Working Group (MSWG), chaired by the Irish Maritime Administration, a division within my Department produces booklets and posters entitled "Safety on the Water" providing basic safety guidelines and advice for recreational craft users, fishermen, divers etc. who take to the waters of Ireland. The Group's aim is to create and communicate marine safety information and messages to endeavour to reduce accidents and to prevent the loss of life in Irish Waters. It co-ordinates the publication of water safety messages through media broadcasts, publications, brochures and posters including increasing public awareness of the requirement to wear PFDs, use of VHF radio and emergency contact numbers.

In addition to the above actions, my Department also promotes the use of PFDs through its circulation of The Code of Practice for the Safe Operation of Recreational Craft, which was revised in 2017 and gives straightforward safety advice on best practice to operators and owners of recreational craft. <http://www.dttas.ie/content/new-code-practice-safe-operation-recreational-craft>.

I understand that this has been a difficult time for both families and I hope that you are reassured by my Department's efforts to ensure the safety of all while at sea.

Driver Test Data

1081. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of registered driver instructors that are independent or self-employed as opposed to being franchised to companies such as a company (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35568/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Details of all driving instructors (ADIs), as approved by the Road Safety Authority (RSA), can be found on the RSA website at <http://www.rsa.ie/en/RSA/Learner-Drivers/Finding-an-instructor/Find-an-instructor/>.

Public Transport Fares

1082. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to review Irish Rail train fare costs in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35611/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport Authority (NTA) has responsibility for regulating fares charged by public transport operators. I have therefore forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Marine Casualty Investigations Board

1083. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will request the Marine Casualty Investigation Board to reinvestigate the deaths of persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35656/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Marine Casualty Investigation Board was set up under the Merchant Shipping (Investigation of Marine Casualties) Act, 2000 to investigate marine casualties and publish reports of such investigations. Under Section 8 of the Act, the MCIB is established as being independent of the Minister in the performance of its functions and, in general, is independent of any other person or body whose interests could conflict with the functions of the Board.

The purpose of an investigation is to establish the cause or causes of a marine casualty with a view to making recommendations for the avoidance of similar casualties. Under the Act, it is specifically not the purpose of an investigation to attribute blame or fault.

Before publishing a Report, the Board is required to send a draft of the report or sections of the draft to any person who, in its opinion, is likely to be adversely affected by the publishing of the report (or their representatives), who have 28 days to submit observations.

In relation to re-opening of MCIB investigations, section 33 (1) of the Merchant Shipping (Investigation of Marine Casualties) Act, 2000 provides that "the Board may re-open a completed investigation if satisfied there is new evidence available which could be likely to materi-

ally alter the findings of the investigation and the purpose of the investigation would be served by re-opening it". However, I understand that the Board has no plans currently to re-open the investigation in this particular case.

Under the Act the Minister has certain powers, for example after consulting the Board, the Minister may direct an inquiry be held into a marine casualty or direct that a completed inquiry be re-opened if the Minister is satisfied there is new evidence likely to materially alter the outcome.

I am aware of the marine casualty at Helvick Pier Co Waterford on 23rd May 2010, to which you refer, in which Mr. John O'Brien & Mr. Pat Esmonde were lost overboard and their remains recovered on 25th May 2010. In the event that new evidence is now available in relation to this matter, the Act allows such evidence to be brought to the attention of the Board.

Military Aircraft Landings

1084. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 61 of 21 June 2018, if the aircraft was or was not in Irish controlled airspace. [35658/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As previously indicated in my reply to Dail Question No. 200 dated 14 June 2018, the aircraft in question, while over international waters, was diverted to Shannon Airport due to technical issues.

I understand that the event was reported as occurring at the boundary of the Shannon and Shanwick Upper Flight Information Regions (UIR). The location is within Irish controlled airspace but over international waters and, as such, the matter would not be the subject of an investigation by the relevant Irish authorities.

In this context, it is important to make a distinction between Irish "sovereign" airspace and Irish "controlled" airspace.

Irish sovereign airspace, by definition and international agreement, is the portion of the atmosphere controlled by Ireland above its territory, including its territorial waters (i.e. 12 nautical miles out from the coastline). Airspace beyond a country's territorial limit is termed "international".

Ireland, as a party to international agreements, provides certain air traffic management services in some parts of international airspace, including the Shannon UIR. However, the relevant international treaty sets out that when the location of an incident cannot be established as being within or over the territory of another State, the State of Operator, after consultation with the State of Registry, should accept full or partial responsibility for the conduct of the investigation.

In this instance, it was established that the event did not occur in the territory of the State, as it was beyond the 12 mile territorial limit.

Military Aircraft Landings

1085. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 2179 of 24 July 2018, if permission was given for munitions or explosives to be taken through Shannon Airport on an aircraft (details supplied) which landed at the airport on 11 July 2018. [35659/18]

1086. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 2179 of 24 July 2018, if the attention of authorities and fire personnel at Shannon Airport was drawn to munitions and or explosives on board an aircraft (details supplied) which landed there on 11 July 2018 while it was parked very close to civilian passenger aircraft at the main terminal building; and the special precautions taken to minimise the danger to civilians at the airport. [35660/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1085 and 1086 together.

Shannon Airport Authority has confirmed that the aircraft in question transitted through Shannon Airport as a technical stop for aviation fuel on a number of occasions during July 2018.

I understand that the Airport Authority has no information of there being either munitions or dangerous goods on board the aircraft. No application for an exemption under S.I. 224/1973 was made to my Department.

Road Projects Status

1087. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the N81 upgrade project; if the project will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35667/18]

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. However, the planning, design and operation of individual roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

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

Road Traffic Accidents Data

1088. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of fatalities involving road traffic accidents on the N81 in each of the years 2011 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35668/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The number of fatalities on the N81 from 2011 to 2018 is set out in the table.

Number of fatalities by year which happened on the N81

Year	Fatalities
2011	3
2012	0
2013	3
2014	1
2015	2
2016*	1

2017*	1
2018*	0
Total	11

*provisional and subject to change. Correct up to 10/08/2018

It should also be noted that on the N81, of the eight fatalities that happened between 2013 and 2018, five resulted in the death of a motorcyclist.

Public Transport Fares

1089. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a review of train fares for Newbridge, Kildare and Athy rail commuters that remain outside the short-hop commuter zone will be considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35674/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport Authority (NTA) has responsibility for regulating fares charged by public transport operators. I have therefore forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Roads Maintenance Funding

1090. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if funding will be made available in 2019 for the restoration of Coughlanstown Road, County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35706/18]

1091. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if Coughlanstown Road, Ballymore Eustace, County Kildare will be considered for national funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35707/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1090 and 1091 together.

The position remains as previously outlined to the Deputy in response to PQ3260/18:

The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of each local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from local authorities' own resources supplemented by State road grants.

As the selection and prioritisation of works is the responsibility of the local authority, it is a matter for the Council to assess the options open to it in relation to this road, taking the position regarding utility services into account.

National Transport Authority

1092. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the NTA rail review document will be published. [35718/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport

Authority (NTA) and Iarnród Éireann report on the Rail Review was published in 2016. Since then, the NTA has held a public consultation on the Review. Over 300 submissions were received in response to that consultation process.

A report of those submissions has been submitted to my Department by the NTA and I intend to bring the report to Government for consideration. It is my intention that the NTA's report on the consultation would be published by the NTA following consideration by Government.

In advance of that, no decisions have been taken regarding matters such as the future of individual rail lines. I have stated previously that there are no plans for the closure of any parts of the rail network. The Taoiseach has also given assurances in the Dáil in recent months that there are no plans in this regard.

Transport Policy

1093. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on an organisation's (details supplied) request that a fully wheelchair accessible transport system be provided in view of the fact it will dramatically change the lives of persons with disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35767/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. My Department's high level policy goal for accessible public transport is embodied in the concept of 'Transport Access for All'. This policy is based on the provisions of the Disability Act 2005 and related Government strategies, in particular the National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021.

Accessibility features, such as wheelchair access, are built into all new public transport infrastructure projects and vehicles from the design stage. Newer systems such as LUAS are fully accessible.

My Department funds an ongoing programme of accessibility improvement grants to upgrade older existing infrastructure and facilities which is managed by the National Transport Authority (NTA). In Budget 2018 I secured a trebling of the funding provided for the accessibility retro-fit programme to €28m, as part of the 4 year capital envelope announced. This additional funding will facilitate the continued roll-out of the programmes to install accessible bus stops, upgrade train stations to make them accessible to wheelchair users and provide grant support for the introduction of more wheelchair accessible vehicles into the taxi fleet.

Under the Dublin Transport Authority Act 2008 the NTA has functional responsibility for promoting the development of an integrated, accessible public transport network, as well as having responsibility for the management of the accessibility retro-fit programme. The NTA has provided information on (i) the accessibility status of existing public transport infrastructure, (ii) the cost of making public transport services wheelchair accessible and (iii) the accessibility improvements planned with the available funding for the 4 year period 2018-2021 under the retro-fit programme. That information is available on my Department's website www.dttas.gov.ie.

Investment in public transport will be accelerated under the National Development Plan (NDP) over the next ten years and beyond to support the development of an integrated, accessible and sustainable national public transport system. A number of key new major public transport programmes are proposed to be delivered under the NDP over the period to 2027 and these will be fully accessible as part of the normal design. In addition, there will be continued investment in the retro-fit programme under the NDP.

I would like to advise the Deputy that the organisation to which he refers is represented on my Department's Accessibility Consultative Committee, which monitors progress in relation to accessible public transport for people with disabilities.

In addition, I recently appointed to the Boards of the public transport companies, new directors with direct personal experience of disability. One of these new directors is also a member of the organisation to which the Deputy refers. I look forward to all 5 new directors ensuring that the voices of people with a disability will be heard at the top of those bodies responsible for the provision of public transport.

Road Traffic Legislation

1094. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if all sections of the Road Traffic (Amendment) Act 2018 have been commenced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35772/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I would like to thank the Deputy for his concern to see this Act in effect as soon as possible, a concern which I share.

To date, no sections of the Road Traffic (Amendment) Act 2018 have been commenced. The Act addresses two principal matters, drink driving and driving by unaccompanied learners. In each case, preliminary arrangements need to be put in place by my Department and An Garda Síochána before commencement, and work is well under way on this.

At this point it is not possible to give a date for commencement, but I am happy to assure the Deputy that the provisions of the Act will be commenced as soon as practicable.

Driver Test

1095. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a driver test will be expedited for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35803/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The driving test service is run by the Road Safety Authority (RSA) and this Department has no input into the scheduling of appointments.

The RSA provides a facility where driving test cancellations are made available to applicants who may need an urgent appointment. An applicant should contact the RSA directly and request that they be placed on the cancellation list.

In order to be fair to all applicants, cancellation places will be assigned in order of the date of placement on the list. If an applicant requires a driving test urgently for employment or emigration purposes, the RSA will make every effort to accommodate them.

Irish Aviation Authority

1096. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to regulate the use of drones in a circumstance (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35812/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Irish Aviation Authority (IAA) has statutory responsibility for aviation safety regulation in Ireland, including the regulation of remotely piloted aircraft systems (drones), as provided for under S.I. No. 563/2015 - Irish Aviation Authority (Small Unmanned Aircraft (Drones) and Rockets) Order, 2015. I have referred the Deputy's question to the IAA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Road Safety

1097. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the implementation of a road safety measure (details supplied); if there is a timeframe for its delivery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35899/18]

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.

Driver Test Waiting Lists

1098. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason some persons that have applied for driver tests in Tullamore in January 2018 have still not been called. [35907/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): This is a matter for the Road Safety Authority. I have referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response is not received within 10 days.

Driver Test Waiting Lists

1099. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a driver test for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36001/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The driving test service is run by the Road Safety Authority (RSA) and this Department has no input into the scheduling of appointments.

The RSA provides a facility where driving test cancellations are made available to applicants who may need an urgent appointment. An applicant should contact the RSA directly and request that they be placed on the cancellation list. In order to be fair to all applicants, cancellation places will be assigned in order of the date of placement on the list.

If an applicant requires a driving test urgently for employment or emigration purposes, the RSA will make every effort to accommodate them.

Public Transport

1100. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of efforts to address issues with regard to rickshaws; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36009/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): My Department has considered a range of options for regulating rickshaws from the perspectives of proportionality, public safety and enforcement as well as regarding the question of costs and benefits. Options considered included introducing a framework to regulate rickshaws up to introducing a full prohibition. Following formal legal advice in the matter from the Attorney General and further consideration, I now believe that the appropriate response to the concerns raised is to regulate rickshaws with the introduction of a licensing regime. Licensing provisions will, first and foremost, be designed as a framework to help ensure improved public safety and an enhanced rickshaw passenger experience.

My Department is considering the detail of how the new regime could work, including whether it might involve setting new standards that would permit only certain types of rickshaw to be licensed while other types would not be allowed to ply for hire or reward.

Pilot Training Colleges

1101. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the measures being undertaken to assist trainee pilots and their families affected by the collapse of a college (details supplied); the consideration he has given to the testimony provided by families affected by the collapse of the college at a meeting of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Transport, Tourism and Sport on 24 May 2017; if he will engage with those families to resolve the issues affecting them as a result of the collapse of the college; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36024/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, the matter that he raises dates from 2012 when the privately-owned company Pilot Training College Waterford failed and left many of its clients stranded in Florida. The company was regulated by the Irish Aviation Authority (IAA) in accordance with EU civil aviation rules and regulations, but this oversight does not extend to the contractual arrangement between the company and its customers.

It is a deeply regrettable situation, and I am advised that at the time the IAA took remedial action, insofar as it could, to alleviate the immediate impact on the trainee pilots affected. For instance, the IAA paid for repatriation flights to bring the stranded trainee pilots back home from Florida - where they were training - and IAA staff travelled to both Waterford and Florida to secure the training records relating of those affected and provided advice on continuation of training with other providers. Clearly this does not address the financial loss experienced by the trainee pilots from the company reneging on its contractual obligations, but ultimately the resolution of the financial liabilities arising from the company failing remains a legal matter between the company and its clients.

Road Traffic Offences

1102. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a mat-

ter (details supplied) in relation to tractors on public roads will be examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36054/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Section 56 of the Road Traffic Act 1961 (Dangerous driving) provides that a person shall not drive a vehicle in a public place in a manner (including speed) which, having regard to all the circumstances of the case (including the condition of the vehicle, the nature, condition and use of the place and the amount of traffic which then actually is or might reasonably be expected then to be on it) is likely to be dangerous to the public.

In addition, under Part II of the Roads Act, 1993, a person who permits any material to fall from a vehicle they own or use on a public road such that the material is left to pose a hazard or potential hazard to persons using a public road, or obstructs or interferes with the safe use of a public road or the maintenance of a public road, is guilty of an offence.

Enforcement of the legislation is a matter for An Garda Síochána.

Road Safety

1103. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding a road junction in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36077/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): This is a matter for Kerry County Council, in consultation with Transport Infrastructure Ireland where national roads are involved. I would therefore advise the Deputy to contact the Council in the first instance.

Question No. 1104 answered with Question No. 1074.

Road Safety

1105. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if it is permitted for drivers of coaches to perform tour guiding duties while also driving; if this area is regulated in terms of safety, working hours and so on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36123/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): There is no law prohibiting drivers of tour coaches from performing guiding duties while driving.

As professional bus drivers, drivers of coaches are subject to the same safety requirements as all other such drivers, including in particular the requirements of Regulation (EC) No 561/2006, which lays down rules on driving times, breaks and rest periods for drivers of lorries and buses in order to improve working conditions and road safety.

Road Projects Status

1106. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the NTA met with Cork County Council recently to discuss the road upgrade scheme for Lehenaghbeg-Lehenaghmore, County Cork; and if the NTA has taken a favourable view of

this particular project. [36157/18]

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

Sports Capital Programme Administration

1107. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when successful applicants that applied for the capital sports grants 2018 will be notified; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36186/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The Sports Capital Programme is the Government's primary vehicle for providing support to sports clubs and communities to develop sports infrastructure around the country. On the 30th August, Minister Ross and I announced that a new round of the programme was opening for applications with a total of €40m available. Applications can be made from Friday 7th September until Friday 19th October. All applications must be made online at www.sportscapitalprogramme.ie and organisations not already registered on the site must do so by Friday, 5 October.

The 2017 round of the programme attracted a record 2,320 applications. A number of new measures have been introduced for this round to make the process even more user-friendly including giving applicants the opportunity to submit corrected documentation. Prior to knowing the number of applications received under the new round it is not possible to say how long it will take to fully complete the assessment process.

Maritime Safety Regulations

1108. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the details of applications to have boats surveyed to assess their suitability to operate as passenger vessels received by the Marine Survey Office in 2017 and to date in 2018; the dates on which all applications were received by the office; the dates on which a determination was made in respect of same; in the case of outstanding applications the date on which a decision will issue; the average turnaround time for applications, that is, the length of time between applications first being received by the office and a decision issuing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36187/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): It is not possible in the timeframe to answer the Deputy's question as it would involve the individual inspection of approximately 800 surveys and associated records. For clarity, surveys carried out by the MSO can be very extensive, spanning several months for larger new-build vessels. Surveys are processes and are not single events and can involve a number of surveyors from the MSO specialising in different aspects. They include the owner, the crew and specialist companies such as shipyards representing the owner and ship designers. These surveys also include inspections under various statutory instruments which the MSO has responsibility for. While my Department is happy to assist the Deputy in this matter, it would be helpful to clarify whether the issue relates to a specific vessel survey. My Department will be in contact to seek further clarification on the scope of your question and hopefully avoid any unnecessary administrative costs in replying.

Questions - Written Answers
Sports Capital Programme

1109. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if national lottery funding will be made available to sports clubs in the next 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36203/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The Sports Capital Programme is the Government's primary vehicle for providing support to sports clubs and communities to develop sports infrastructure around the country. On the 30th August, Minister Ross and I announced that a new round of the programme was opening for applications with a total of €40m available. Applications can be made from Friday 7th September until Friday 19th October. All applications must be made online at www.sportscapitalprogramme.ie and organisations not already registered on the site must do so by Friday, 5 October.

Anti-Social Behaviour

1110. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the measures in place to deal with and to curb anti-social behaviour on the rail networks including Iarnród Éireann and Luas; his plans to introduce additional measures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36217/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): There were 45.5 million passenger journeys in 2017 on Iarnród Éireann, the vast majority of which occurred without incident.

The safety and security of passengers and staff, including arrangements to deal with anti-social behaviour on trains, are matters first and foremost for Iarnród Éireann, in conjunction with, as appropriate, An Garda Síochána. On the Luas, these are matters for the transport operator (Transdev) in conjunction with, as appropriate, An Garda Síochána.

I am, however, concerned to ensure that the necessary arrangements are in place to ensure the safety of all passengers and staff travelling and working on our rail network. Therefore, I recently wrote to Irish Rail and the Railway Safety Advisory Council (RSAC) to seek their views on the issue of anti-social behaviour on the rail network.

In its response, Irish Rail outlined a number of measures that the company has taken in an effort to safeguard the security of passengers and staff, particularly during this busy summer period. These measures have included the allocation of additional security and supervisory operatives, particularly at night and in certain areas, as well as more resources for centralised CCTV monitoring stations. The company also stated that it works closely with An Garda Síochána on anti-social behaviour in general and receives the full support of the Gardaí. The RSAC recommended the establishment of a dedicated unit of An Garda Síochána to police our rail network on occasions when the possibility of anti-social behaviour is high.

I have also written to the Minister for Justice to seek his views as to how we might best address the issue of anti-social behaviour on our transport system, in particular on the Irish Rail network. I have asked that the Minister consider this issue in conjunction with An Garda Síochána, given that the allocation of all Garda resources, including the manner in which Garda personnel are deployed, is solely a decision for the Garda Commissioner and his management team.

Consultancy Contracts Data

1111. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 503 of 15 May 2018, the name of all consultants and the fees paid or due to them by the NTA and TII, his Department or other public funding streams regarding the MetroLink project in each of the years 2011 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form. [36224/18]

1112. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the fees charged by consultants to the State including the NTA, TII, his Department and the other State agencies involved regarding BusConnects in each of the years 2014 to 2017 and to date in 2018. [36225/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1111 and 1112 together.

As the Deputy is aware from replies to previous PQs in this matter, the National Transport Authority has statutory responsibility for the development and implementation of public transport in the Greater Dublin Area including the development, planning and allocation of funding for BusConnects and for MetroLink working with Transport Infrastructure Ireland. My Department has not incurred any direct consultancy costs in relation to either of these projects.

In light of its responsibilities, I have referred the Deputy's questions again to the NTA for a direct reply in the matter. Please inform my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Road Safety

1113. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason his Department does not include funding for preventative safety measures being developed under a non-national safety scheme or low cost accident scheme in areas which have increased risk of accidents occurring due to new development; the other funding schemes available for councils to develop pedestrian crossings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36242/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of each local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the Council's own resources supplemented by State road grants.

Applications for funding under the Department's Safety Improvement Scheme are invited on an annual basis for funding in the subsequent year. Councils are made aware of the conditions in relation to applications for funding and are advised that preference will be given to proposals in the cost range €2,000 to €30,000 and that proposals in higher cost ranges, (i.e. €30,000 to €250,000) may be considered if the benefit to cost ratio is promising. While preference is given to locations with a collision history, in some situations consideration will be given to locations where a hazard can be clearly demonstrated.

Local authorities are asked to submit applications for funding in order of priority and in this context it is up to individual local authorities to prioritise schemes accordingly.

It is also open to Councils to develop pedestrian crossings from their Discretionary grant or from their own resources.

As regards the impact of new developments, it is for the relevant planning authority to consider planning applications and to decide what conditions should be attached to a planning approval, including traffic management measures where appropriate.

Road Tolls

1114. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason the toll charged for using the N4 Sligo to Dublin is the highest toll charge here despite the fact the motorway status road only covers the distance from Mullingar to Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36246/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy in relation to roads. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects on national roads are a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the relevant local authority. For regional and local roads it is a matter for each respective local authority.

More specifically, the statutory powers to levy tolls on national roads as well as regional and local roads, to make toll bye-laws and to enter into toll agreements with private investors are vested in TII (for national roads) and each local authority (for regional and local roads) under Part V of the Roads Act 1993 (as amended by the Planning and Development Act 2000 and the Roads Act 2007).

Noting the above, I am referring the question to TII for direct reply within 10 working days. Please inform my private office if you do not receive the information.

Road Safety Authority Data

1115. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of RSA officers operating in counties Sligo, Leitrim, Donegal, Mayo, Galway and Roscommon who are tasked with specifically tackling unlicensed road transport operators; the number of investigations undertaken and convictions obtained with regard to unlicensed road transport operations in the north west; the efforts made in this region to combat unlicensed road hauliers and the customers who obtain their services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36248/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): These are matters for the Road Safety Authority and I have referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response is not received within 10 days.

Dublin Bus Services

1116. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on Dublin Bus not issuing change refunds from 21 September 2018; his views on whether the rights of commuters are being vindicated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36269/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation

to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the development and implementation of public transport in the Greater Dublin Area, including fares and ticketing.

As the Deputy is aware passengers may still pay with cash and are advised to have the exact fare when boarding. Currently over 70% of fare payments are made by Leap card, which is generally at least 20% cheaper for passengers and is far more efficient than a cash fare.

As part of the BusConnects programme the NTA are proposing a move to cashless operations on buses. By moving to a cashless system under the BusConnects programme, this will bring greater efficiencies, reduce journey times and improve the passenger journey experience for commuters. To make way for this, BusConnects will incorporate the latest developments in account-based ticketing technology, potentially allowing use of credit/debit cards or mobile devices as a convenient means of payment. This will also allow integration with other transport payments such as parking facilities and bicycle hire.

Road Signage

1117. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the revised traffic signs manual will be amended; the date on which the signs will be erected showing Ireland West Airport Knock; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36369/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Traffic Signs Manual (TSM) constitutes a Ministerial Direction to road authorities under section 95(16) of the Road Traffic Act 1961, and is available from my Department's website.

The TSM stipulates the traffic signs to be used on Irish roads, their layout and symbols, the circumstances in which each sign should be used and the rules for positioning them.

Work towards updating the Manual is at an advanced stage and it is expected to be completed during 2018.

The erection of traffic signs is a matter for the relevant road authority.

Departmental Communications

1118. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the positions in his Department and the organisations under its aegis that have arrangements in place for lo-call numbers or 1800, 1850 and 1890 telephone numbers for members of the public to contact his Department or organisations under its aegis; the number of these that are completely free to call for persons who use mobile telephones and may incur major bills telephoning such organisations; if the situation will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36406/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): My Department currently has two Lo-Call numbers which can be found on the Department's Website.

Neither of these numbers are free to either landline or mobile users; the cost of mobile calls to the department are determined by the service provider not the department.

My Department does not currently use 1800,1850 or 1890 numbers.

My Department is currently investing in newer telephony technologies and as part of this we will be reviewing all published telephone numbers.

If as a result of this review the published numbers change, the Department's website will be updated to reflect these changes.

The telephone contact services of the State Agencies under the aegis of my Department are a day-to-day operational issue for these agencies and I have no function in that regard.

Tourism Promotion

1119. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if Fáilte Ireland plans to open a new tourist information office in either Malahide and-or Howth, County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36417/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The management of the Tourist Information Office network is an operational matter for the Board and management of Fáilte Ireland. Accordingly, I have referred the Deputy's Question to them for further information and direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Driver Test Data

1120. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of persons awaiting driver tests; and the number who have been allocated a test date. [36494/18]

1121. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of persons awaiting a driver test date by county; the average waiting time; and the longest expected waiting time in tabular form. [36495/18]

1122. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of persons who have been allocated a driver test date by county; the average waiting time; and the longest expected waiting time in tabular form. [36496/18]

1123. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of driver instructors recruited in each of the years 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018; the number of instructors who have retired or left their posts in each of those years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36497/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1120 to 1123, inclusive, together.

The Deputy's questions are a matter for the Road Safety Authority. I have referred the questions to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response is not received within 10 days.

Traffic Management

1124. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the legislative provisions required to implement and enforce variable speed limits on the M50; when

this legislation will be introduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36535/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) has proposed the introduction of variable speed limits on our motorways, particularly the M50, in the interests of both safety and traffic management.

My officials are currently examining this proposal with a view to identifying any legislative changes which may be needed, and if it transpires that primary legislation is indeed required, provision will be made in the current Road Traffic Bill which is under preparation in my Department.

Driver Test Waiting Lists

1125. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the waiting times for a driver test at Gorey and Wexford test centres; the national average waiting time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36544/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The information the Deputy is requesting is available on the Road Safety Authority website at <http://www.rsa.ie/en/RSA/Learner-Drivers/The-Driving-Test/Test-Waiting-Times/>. This information is updated weekly.

Public Transport Fares

1126. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the full-year cost of halving public transport fares; the full-year cost of making public transport free for all; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36599/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport Authority (NTA) has responsibility for public transport fares and I have therefore forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days

Road Projects Status

1127. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the expected completion date for the widening of the N7; the contractual stipulations in regard to timelines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36610/18]

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 (TII) 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 do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Road Traffic Legislation

1128. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the rationale for the law under which haulage motorists may be fined €80 or more and receive one penalty point for overtaking a slow-moving vehicle on a motorway; and his plans to amend the legislation (details supplied). [36651/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The reason for the ban on the use of the furthest right-hand lane on a motorway by vehicles that are subject to a maximum speed limit of 90 km/h is based on vehicle speed differentials and the consequent road safety considerations. For example, the road speed for cars on a motorway is a maximum of 120 km/h whereas the maximum speed a heavy good vehicle (“HGV”) may travel is 90 km/h. The allowable maximum speed of HGVs therefore renders them incapable of reaching the maximum motorway speed of 120 km/h that other vehicles are permitted to reach. This forms the basis for disallowing HGVs from driving in an outer motorway lane (the so-called ‘fast lane’ or ‘overtaking lane’).

Regulation 33(1)(d) of the Road Traffic (Traffic and Parking) Regulations 1997 (S.I. No. 182 of 1997) as amended by the Road Traffic (Traffic and Parking) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 (S.I. No. 74 of 2012), provides that a driver on a motorway shall not “drive a vehicle of a class for which an ordinary speed limit of not more than 90 kilometres per hour is prescribed by regulations under sections 3 and 4 of the Road Traffic Act, 2004 in the traffic lane nearest the right hand edge of a carriageway having more than one traffic lane except where it is necessary to proceed in that lane due to an obstruction or because another lane or lanes is or are for the time being closed to traffic”.

There are no plans to amend the current provisions in this regard.

Rail Network

1129. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the Dublin city centre resignalling project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36659/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The City Centre Re-signalling Project is part of the DART Expansion Programme which, as the Deputy is aware, is a series of interlinked projects that also have benefits as stand-alone projects. The City Centre Re-signalling project is expected to be completed in 2019 and will allow for an increase in the number of trains travelling through the city centre. This will enhance both speed and services on the rail network not just in the city centre but throughout the Greater Dublin Area (GDA).

Noting the role of the National Transport Authority (NTA) in ensuring the planning and delivery of the public transport infrastructure priorities in the GDA, I have forwarded the Deputy’s question to the NTA for further response.

Disabled Drivers Permits

1130. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to introduce legislation to extend eligibility to a disabled parking permit to provide for the carers of persons with autism; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36682/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I currently do not have any plans to expand the current criteria for eligibility for the Disabled Person’s Parking

Permit to cover children or adults with autism, or other hidden disabilities. At present, the permit is available to people living in Ireland with a permanent disability, medical condition, severe mobility difficulties and to people who are registered blind. The medical criteria for issue of the permit are strict and only persons whose mobility is severely and permanently restricted qualify.

These criteria were revised and clarified in my Department's Review of the Disabled Parking Scheme in 2010. The review recommended revising the eligibility criteria for the disabled parking permit to focus on limitations on mobility rather than on diagnosis of particular medical conditions or illness. This was in line with the original intention of the scheme. Where a condition is associated with a de facto physical inability of the disabled person to walk related to development delay with physical impacts, respiratory problems or cardiac problems, a permit is usually granted as there are measurable criteria to assist making a judgement and a recognised practitioner base to refer to.

To extend the criteria to include other categories, key stakeholders would need to present a case for a further review of the scheme which I would be willing to give consideration to. This submission would need to take account of the benefit to the person with the particular category of disability from access to the parking spaces designated for disabled persons. A definition of the category, including the point of severity where the need for the permit can be categorised as severe, a mechanism for measurement and the professional body competent to define severity would also be required, along with an estimate of the likely population to be included in the category.

Road Projects Status

1131. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of plans to develop the M20 motorway between Limerick and Cork; when a design team will be appointed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36690/18]

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 (TII) 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 do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Road Projects

1132. **Deputy Kevin O'Keefe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has been furnished with the preliminary report on the route and design of the proposed M20 Cork to Limerick motorway. [36710/18]

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 (TII) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

With regard to reporting requirements I would like to explain that, in line with the requirements of the Public Spending Code (PSC) and my Department's Capital Appraisal Framework (CAF), two sets of approvals are required in relation to projects such as the M20 Cork to Limerick motorway - approval of the Business Case and Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA) for the project and separately, approval by An Bord Pleanála (ABP) of an application for development consent. Neither of these milestones have yet been reached in respect of this project.

TII has advised me that Technical Advisors for the project are currently being procured by Limerick City and County Council. As a consequence the planning and design of the Scheme are due to commence in 2019. This process will include a number of project stages including an examination of project concept and feasibility, options selection and design and environmental evaluation.

Sports Capital Programme

1133. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the amount of sports capital funding 2018 will be increased in view of the fact that the terms of eligibility have been relaxed to enable more applicants to apply to the scheme. [36711/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The Sports Capital Programme is the Government's primary vehicle for providing support to sports clubs and communities to develop sports infrastructure around the country. Under the 2017 round of the programme a record 2,320 applications were submitted and €62m was allocated to 1,837 individual projects. For the first time, every valid local application received a grant offer. The funding in my Department's subhead in 2018 is sufficient to cover all commitments under the 2017 and previous rounds of the Sports Capital Programme.

On the 30 August 2018, having reviewed the 2017 round, and mindful of the need to further improve the programme, Minister Ross and I announced that a new round of the programme was opening for applications. €40m will be available. Applications can be made from Friday 7 September until Friday 19 October. All applications must be made online at www.sportscapital-programme.ie and organisations not already registered on the site must do so by Friday 5 October. Prior to the closing date it is not possible to state the total amount sought under this new round.

Road Network

1134. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he or the NTA have plans or proposals to bypass the town of Headford, County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36725/18]

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 (TII) 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 do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Rail Network Expansion

1135. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the review of phase 2 Athenry to Tuam and phase 3 Tuam to Claremorris of the western rail corridor has commenced; if not, when it is expected to commence; the details of the appointed contractor; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36751/18]

1136. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the timeline for the completion of the review of the western rail corridor; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36752/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1135 and 1136 together.

As the Deputy is aware, both the Programme for a Partnership Government and the recently-published National Development Plan commit to an independent review of the costings for a proposal to extend the existing Western Rail Corridor (WRC).

My Department has been developing an approach for progressing such a review in line with these commitments, while also cognisant of the need for stakeholder consultation as part of the process.

I recently briefed Government on how I plan to give effect to the Government's commitments in relation to the review. In this regard a process for an independent financial and economic evaluation of the WRC phase 2 is now underway that will also include broad consultation. I expect that Irish Rail and my Department will progress this over the coming months and I will then report to Government with the findings.

Driver Test

1137. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a driver test appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36761/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The driving test service is run by the Road Safety Authority and my Department has no input into the scheduling of appointments. The Authority provides a facility where driving test cancellations are made available to applicants who may need an urgent appointment. An applicant should contact the Authority directly and request that they be placed on the cancellation list. In order to be fair to all applicants, cancellation places will be assigned in order of the date of placement on the list. If an applicant requires a driving test urgently for employment or emigration purposes, the Authority will make every effort to accommodate them.

Light Rail Projects Provision

1138. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the extension of the Luas green line from Broombridge into the Dublin 15 area; his plans to investigate the benefits of such extension; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36804/18]

1139. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his

plans to extend the Luas red and green lines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36805/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1138 and 1139 together.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA), including the light rail network.

The NTA's Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) 2016-2035 provides the overarching framework for the planning and delivery of transport infrastructure and services in the GDA over the next two decades.

The strategy includes a number of proposals to further develop the light rail network in the GDA including the Luas. These include Extension of the Luas Green Line to Bray; Extension of Luas Cross City to Finglas; Luas to Lucan; and Luas Red Line extension to Poolbeg. The strategy does not include a proposal for a light rail extension to the wider Dublin 15 area.

Building on the success of Government's continued investment in building capacity and expanding the Luas network, the National Development Plan (NDP) will provide funding to undertake appraisal, planning and design of Luas network expansion to Finglas and also Bray, Lucan and Poolbeg. This is to ensure that we will be ready to expand Luas to where and when it is needed in line with sustained development in these areas.

Road Traffic Legislation

1140. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when all sections of the Road Traffic (Amendment) Act 2018 will be commenced; the sections which are awaiting commencement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36806/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): My Department is working to implement the provisions of the Road Traffic (Amendment) Act 2018 at the earliest possible date.

The Deputy will appreciate that a certain amount of preparatory work is necessary, in conjunction with An Garda Síochána in particular, before the new provisions can be commenced. As the Deputy will also appreciate, after the unconscionable delays to the passage of the Act caused by a small group, I am particularly eager to see this legislation brought into effect as quickly as is feasible. At the same time, it is important to be sure that all of the necessary mechanisms are in place before we do so.

To date no provisions of the Act have been commenced, but work is well advanced. I expect the drink-driving provisions of the Act will be commenced first, with the provisions relating to unaccompanied learner drivers to follow soon afterwards.

Road Projects Status

1141. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of proposed works on the N2 from Rath to Kilmoon, County Meath. [36833/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Trans-

port, 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 (TII) 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 do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Harbours and Piers

1142. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the timeline for the transfer of Dún Laoghaire harbour to Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council; the directors of the harbour company; and the date each directorship expires. [36897/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Dun Laoghaire Harbour Company (DLHC) is designated under National Ports Policy 2013 to transfer to Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council (DLRCoCo).

The Chief Executive of DLRCoCo undertook due diligence of the port company in preparation for transfer and presented her report to the Council on 9 January 2017. The CE then presented a further risk assessment report to the DLR Council at a Special Meeting held on 6 March 2018. At that meeting, the CE and the Council concluded that the most appropriate method of transfer for the company is the transfer and dissolution method.

I subsequently wrote to the CE DLRCoCo on 29 March 2018 to confirm the model of transfer as that of the dissolution of the company and the transfer of all assets, employees and liabilities to the Council on the date of transfer. This is in line with the expressed preference of the CE and Council that the port will operate as part of the local authority structure. Issues raised in relation to the risk assessment were then clarified at meetings that took place between the relevant officials after that date.

I gave my consent to the transfer on 11 July and Minister/PER (as a Shareholder) gave his consent on 17 July and signed the Order for transfer. The Order was then sent to the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government in mid July.

The current Board of Directors is as outlined below:

Ms Eithne Scott Lennon (Chair)	Expiry of term 23 September 2018
Mr Mark Finan	Expiry of term 11 February 2019
Mr James Jordan	Expiry of term 11 February 2019
Mr Gerry Dunne CEO	Ex-officio

Road Network

1143. **Deputy Kevin O'Keefe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will request of Transport Infrastructure Ireland, TII, that Waterloo junction on the N21, Cork, remain permanently open while health and safety measures are implemented. [36898/18]

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 (TII) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Therefore, I have no statutory remit over the planning and design of individual projects.

Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's question to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Dublin Bus Services

1144. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he is satisfied that the National Transport Authority is undertaking sufficient public consultation in respect of the BusConnects project; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the consultation sessions across the greater Dublin area are not in the format of community meetings but, rather, information stands; his views on the fact that commuters need a more in-depth consultative process to ensure the success of the revision of the greater Dublin area public transport network; his plans in relation to same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36954/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware the "Dublin Area Bus Network Redesign Public Consultation Report" was published by the National Transport Authority (NTA) on 2 July. A public consultation process on the Network Redesign proposals launched on 16 July was immediately followed by local and national representative's briefings and publication of proposals. The public consultation process will run until 28th September.

The NTA and Dublin Bus have embarked on a process of full public consultation involving local brochures, local face-to-face events organised at various locations around the city, digital imaging of the network, online surveys and consultation with user groups.

I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for a further update on the matters raised.

Early Childhood Care and Education Programmes

1145. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs when an application by a person (details supplied) for equipment and works will be funded; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35804/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Access and Inclusion Model (AIM), is a programme of supports to enable children with a disability to access and fully participate in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme. It was introduced in June 2016 and is administered by Pobal on behalf of my Department. AIM supports children with disabilities to attend mainstream pre-school where they can learn and socialise with their peers. It includes 7 levels of progressive support, moving from the universal to the targeted. The degree of support provided depends on the needs of the child in the context of the pre-school setting they are attending.

In relation to this particular child, Pobal has advised that the orders for the Wall Mounted Changing Table and the Shelf Unit with Doors have been sent to the HSE and are being processed by them. As soon as they have processed the requests, both items will be ordered and delivered directly to the Centre. The items will be paid for directly by Pobal on behalf of my Department, and there will therefore be no requirement for funding to the Service in relation to

these items.

Early Childhood Care and Education

1146. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will consider, further to correspondence, amending the early childhood care and education scheme and removing a restriction (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35900/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): From September 2018, all children meeting the minimum age requirement of 2 years and 8 months will be eligible for a full two programme years on the Early Childhood Care and Education programme (ECCE). This measure adds to previous enhancement of the programme and increases the duration of each registered child on ECCE from the original 38 weeks to a potential duration of 76 weeks (two programme years). This delivers on a commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government that is good for children and families.

It must be noted that age limits have been used to determine eligibility since the inception of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme in 2010. These rules are a necessary component of any Government scheme and ensure that Exchequer funding is used for its intended purpose.

The upper age limit for the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme was set in consultation with the Department of Education and Skills. It ensures that children transition into primary school with their peers and limits the age range of children beginning primary school. Limiting the diversity in age ranges in children beginning primary school education is considered generally to be in the best interest of children, in relation to peer interaction in junior infants, as well as other educational considerations.

My Department does its best to ensure, in so far as possible, the equitable treatment of all children and families who apply for childcare funding under the ECCE Programme. In order to ensure objectivity and fairness, it is essential that clear rules exist for the scheme and that they are applied evenly. An essential component of the ECCE programme rules is an eligibility start date to ensure that the programme can be administered and budgeted for in an appropriate manner. As stated above, the Department of Education and Skills informed the policy which these rules support.

Children and Family Services Provision

1147. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if a unit (details supplied) in Castleblaney, County Monaghan, will be reopened; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36264/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am advised by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, that the Unit to which the Deputy refers was closed a number of years ago, and the buildings are currently in use by Tusla community services. Tusla have advised that there are no plans to reopen the Unit.

Child Care Costs

1148. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to increase support for childcare costs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36910/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Over the last three budgets (2016, 2017 and 2018), Government has increased investment in childcare by approximately 80%. It is critical that the Government continues to invest in the early years sector to benefit all children and family types and I am very much committed to continuing to push for this investment. The Affordable Childcare Scheme we are developing will provide us with a great infrastructure from which to support childcare costs for parents. Other initiatives introduced this year and last such as the expansion of the free pre-school scheme to two years and the introduction of universal payments for children under 3 are already having an impact.

Further investment in childcare is currently being considered in the context of the budget/estimates process. As this process has not yet been finalised, the Deputy will appreciate that I cannot go into specific detail on my plans.

Early Years Sector

1149. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if an application by an organisation (details supplied) for an early years and school-age grant will be reviewed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35415/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): This year saw a significant increase in demand for Early Years and School Age Childcare Capital grants with nearly 2,000 applications received and appraised. I secured €6.86 million in funding for capital projects; however the level of demand and high quality of applications meant that unfortunately there were services that despite the obvious quality of their applications still missed out on funding.

The Early Years and School Age Capital Programme for 2018 was designed to target the areas of most need in the childcare sector by providing vital funding to services to complete capital projects. This year has seen an improvement in the timeline for delivery with the initial notifications reaching applicants by early June. This will give successful applicants more time to complete their capital projects and will also facilitate a more timely review process.

There has been a review process put in place for services that wished to receive feedback and a review of their application. This process, like the appraisal process, is being managed by Pobal on behalf of my Department. The review process is on-going and every service that applied will be treated in a fair and impartial manner. The service in question has already applied for a review and will be informed of the outcome directly when Pobal have concluded the process.

Child and Family Agency Staff

1150. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if Tusla is operating its own internal complaints policy and procedures; and if there are published guidelines for same. [35420/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, recognises the right of all employees to be treated with dignity and respect

and is committed to ensuring that all employees are provided with a safe working environment, which is free from all forms of bullying, sexual harassment and harassment. Tusla has advised that all employees are encouraged to raise genuine concerns about possible wrongdoing at the earliest opportunity, and in an appropriate way.

Tusla's Dignity at Work Policy has a strong preventative focus and emphasises that every employee has a duty to maintain a working environment in which the dignity of everyone is respected.

Tusla has advised that where an employee has a concern regarding his/her terms and conditions of employment, working environment or working relationships may be dealt with under the Grievance Procedure. This procedure enables employees to raise complaints concerning work-related matters so that the issue may be addressed promptly and as close as possible to the point of origin.

Child Abuse

1151. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if an investigation will be launched into whether the threshold for the reporting of child abuse was reached in the cases shown in a programme (details supplied); and if instances of child abuse not featured in the programme but brought to the attention of the company concerned through content moderation activity and which reach the reporting threshold have all been reported to the appropriate authorities. [35509/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Child protection is everyone's responsibility. In order to keep children as safe as possible it is important that people across society can recognise when the children that they are in contact with are being harmed and that they are aware of what action to take in response.

The Children First Act 2015, which was fully commenced in December 2017, provides for a number of key child protection measures, including raising awareness of child abuse and neglect, providing for reporting and management of child protection concerns and improving child protection arrangements in organisations providing services to children.

Section 10 of the Act requires that providers of relevant services to children ensure, as far as is practicable, that each child availing of the service from the provider is safe from harm while availing of that service. Section 14 of the Act imposes a specific obligation on mandated reporters to report child protection concerns above a certain threshold, i.e. that a child has been harmed, is being harmed or is at risk of being harmed, to Tusla. Harm is defined in the Act.

The statutory obligations under these two Sections of the Act and the determination in any set of circumstances as to whether to refer a report to Tusla lies with the mandated reporter or with the provider of a relevant service to children, as, or if, applicable.

The Act operates side-by-side with the non-statutory obligations provided for in Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children. The guidance, which was revised last year to include reference to the provisions of the Act, describes the main types of abuse and signs for its recognition and sets out what action should be taken to help ensure that a child who may be at risk is protected from harm. It describes how to report a child protection concern and what happens when a report is made to the Child and Family Agency, Tusla.

The key principle of Children First is that child protection issues are the responsibility of all and that child safety and welfare concerns must be dealt with as and where they arise. In this

regard, my colleague, the Minister for Communication, Climate Action and Environment, met with representatives of the company concerned to discuss the issues raised in the programme referred to by the Deputy.

A 90 minute e-learning training module was developed by Tusla to support the implementation of Children First. The module, which is universally available free of charge on the Tusla website *www.tusla.ie*, includes information on how to recognise and report child abuse.

Following the broadcast of the programme in question I called on all social media providers to ensure their moderator and subcontractor staff undertake the online Children First training. I understand that Tusla will meet with the company concerned next month to discuss this issue further.

The provisions of the Criminal Justice (Withholding of Information on Offences Against Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012 are also relevant.

Child Abuse

1152. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if an investigation will be launched into whether the threshold for the reporting of child abuse was reached in the cases shown in a programme (details supplied); and if instances of child abuse not featured in the programme but brought to the attention of the company concerned through content moderation activity reached that threshold in these cases. [35510/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Child protection is everyone's responsibility. In order to keep children as safe as possible it is important that people across society can recognise when the children that they are in contact with are being harmed and that they are aware of what action to take in response.

The Children First Act 2015, which was fully commenced in December 2017, provides for a number of key child protection measures, including raising awareness of child abuse and neglect, providing for reporting and management of child protection concerns and improving child protection arrangements in organisations providing services to children.

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regard, my colleague, the Minister for Communication, Climate Action and Environment, met with representatives of the company concerned to discuss the issues raised in the programme referred to by the Deputy.

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The provisions of the Criminal Justice (Withholding of Information on Offences Against Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012 are also relevant.

Child and Family Agency

1153. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she is satisfied that a company (details supplied) is suitable to act as a major recruiting agent for Tusla; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35511/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I wish to advise that this is an operational matter for Tusla and my officials have requested that they respond directly to the Deputy.

Affordable Childcare Scheme

1154. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the steps she is taking to prevent crèches operating under the affordable childcare scheme from increasing the fees they charge to parents; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35645/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): In determining their fees childcare providers must take account of amongst other things, rates, rent, labour costs, and insurance. The cost to parents to access childcare is set by childcare providers who must factor in these overheads.

Notwithstanding this, I am committed to ensuring that childcare is affordable, accessible and of a high quality.

My Department monitors the cost of childcare closely and will continue to do so. Research from a sampling of services showed that fee increases across all services delivering full-time childcare rose by €7.13 or 4.3% per week on average between 2015/16 and 2016/17 following a number of years of price stagnation. Further more up to date information is currently being compiled in respect of the 2017/2018 programme year. This will be published in November and I do not expect a significant increase in the average fee figure.

In addition €18.65m was allocated to providers in Programme Support Payments in June and July 2018. The Programme Support Payment is intended to recognise the important role that childcare providers play in the delivery of childcare subvention schemes to families within their services. This may include for example costs associated with administrative work, time spent assisting parents in understanding how they can most benefit from the DCYA-funded

schemes or other non-contact activities. Programme Support Payments were made available for both the ECCE programme and the targeted CCS related schemes.

Gender Balance

1155. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the gender breakdown of the senior management positions in Tusla; and her views on the gender breakdown in her Department in view of the over representation of women in the more junior roles. [35679/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The gender breakdown of senior management positions in Tusla is set out in the following table.

Managers Grades VIII+

Gender	Amount
Male	69
Female	109
Total	178

Tusla has advised it is compliant with its obligations under the Employment Equality Acts, ensuring no employee or candidate is unlawfully discriminated against and individuals are treated fairly and with dignity and respect regardless of:

- Gender
- Civil Status
- Family Status
- Sexual Orientation
- Religious belief or lack of religious belief
- Age
- Disability or the nature of their disability
- Race, colour, nationality or ethnic or national origin
- Membership of the Traveller Community

Furthermore, I am informed that Tusla Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (TEDI) was established in 2018 to implement a strategic vision for equality, diversity and inclusion across Tusla. TEDI, which is led by the Health and Wellbeing Department, supports the review and development of inclusive practices and the integration of equality and diversity issues into all aspects of Tusla's work.

TEDI is comprised of representatives of all staff grades throughout the Agency, harnessing insights and ideas to incorporate into policies and working practices to support a diverse and inclusive workplace.

In respect of my own Department, I am satisfied that the gender breakdown in senior and junior grades is adequate and is broadly in line with the civil service wide norm. There are more women than men at each level in my Department: clerical, middle management and se-

nior management. This is not an over-representation of women but a reflection of the overall representation of women across the civil service.

The most recently available figures to me (end July 2018) indicate that the total gender split across all grades of the civil service is 57.5% female to 42.5% male.

The gender split at senior management level in my Department is 59% female to 41% male. At middle management level, the split is also 59% female to 41% male. At clerical level, the split is 61.5% female to 38.5% male. The overall gender split in my Department is 59.5% female to 40.5% male.

Family Resource Centres

1156. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of family resource centres in County Donegal offering family contact centre services; the process by which they can be accessed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35746/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency administers the Family Resource Centre (FRC) Programme, which is Ireland's largest family support programme, delivering universal services to families in disadvantaged areas across the country. Each Family Resource Centre (FRC) operates autonomously, working inclusively with individuals, families, communities, and both statutory and non-statutory agencies.

Services provided by FRCs across the country vary considerably, depending on the size of the centre, local demographics, level of service usage, and the extent of other local services.

There are nine Family Resource Centres in Donegal at present, and a new FRC is currently being established in Stranorlar, Co. Donegal. The range of family access facilities available in FRCs in County Donegal is outlined as follows:

- Donegal Family Resource Centre provides an unsupervised family access facility which requires a signed agreement between the centre and the family concerned. Families may be directed by the courts to use the facility or can access it directly.

- St. Johnston and Carrigan's Family Resource Centre provides supervised and unsupervised family access facilities. Use of this facility also requires a signed agreement between the centre and the family concerned.

- Unsupervised family access facilities are also available through the following FRCs:

1. The Forge Family Resource Centre, Pettigo,
2. Meevagh Family Resource Centre, Downings,
3. Dunfanaghy Family Resource Centre,
4. Raphoe Family Resource Centre.

- Family access facilities are not available in Cara House Family Resource Centre, Downstrands Family Resource Centre, or Merville Family Resource Centre.

Tusla has advised that it anticipates that a family access facility will be available in the new Finn Valley Family Resource Centre in Stranorlar when the service is fully operational.

Court-ordered family access arrangements are also facilitated by Tusla social workers in Letterkenny, Buncrana and Donegal town.

Tusla recognises Family Resource Centres as an important component of its service delivery model, and will continue to work with them to provide services to children and families in Donegal and throughout the country.

Early Childhood Care and Education Programmes

1157. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if the issue of age limits for children (details supplied) on the ECCE scheme will be examined; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35773/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): From September 2018, all children meeting the minimum age requirement of 2 years and 8 months will be eligible for a full two programme years on the Early Childhood Care and Education programme (ECCE). This measure refines the development introduced last year and increases the duration of each registered child on ECCE from a current average of 61 weeks, to a potential duration of 76 weeks (two programme years). This delivers fully on a commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government that is good for children, families and Early Years providers.

It must be noted that age limits have been used to determine eligibility since the inception of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme in 2010. These rules are a necessary component of any Government scheme and ensure that Exchequer funding is used for its intended purpose. In 2010, only one ECCE year, or 38 weeks, was available. From September 2018, the additional investment secured in Budget 2018 will enable all children from the age of 2 years and 8 months to be eligible for two full programme years.

The upper age limit of 5 years and 6 months for ECCE was set in consultation with senior officials from the Early Years Education Policy Unit in the Department of Education and Skills and is consistent with the law in Ireland with regard to school start age and the associated policy of the Department of Education and Skills.

Furthermore, it ensures that children transition to primary school with their peers and limits the age range of children beginning primary school. Limiting the diversity in age ranges in children beginning primary school education is considered generally to be in the best interest of children, in relation to peer interaction in junior infants, as well as other educational considerations.

My Department does its best to ensure, in so far as possible, the equitable treatment of all children and families who apply for childcare funding under the ECCE Programme. In order to ensure objectivity and fairness it is essential that clear rules exist for the scheme and that they are applied in a fair manner. An essential component of the ECCE scheme's rules is an eligibility date to ensure that the scheme can be administered and budgeted for in an appropriate manner.

Child and Family Agency

1158. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to address issues regarding the lack of funding for an organisation (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35875/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As the subject matter of the Deputy's question relates to an operational matter for Tulsa, I have referred it to Tulsa for a direct reply.

Early Childhood Care and Education Programmes

1159. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of the consultation process undertaken with parents regarding the age limits for ECCE which was due for completion in June 2018 (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35978/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Last December, I announced my decision to pause the proposed rule changes on overage exemptions to allow for a consultation process where the voice of parents of children with disabilities could be heard in relation to the proposed change.

This consultation process, which was conducted by the National Disability Authority and supported jointly by my Department and the Department of Education and Skills, involved a number of steps to include:

- I. Review of the relevant literature and policy;
- II. Review of existing data on overage exemptions, including trends in applications and approvals;
- III. Profile of children currently in receipt of overage exemptions;
- IV. Review of existing data and trends in school starting age;
- V. Identification of options for managing exemptions going forward (including the criteria and application, appraisal and appeals processes) and consider the impact of each option identified for: children and families; pre-schools and schools (including practitioners and teachers); the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) (and its respective Agencies, policies and programmes); and the Department of Education and Skills (DES) (and its respective Agencies, policies and programmes)
- VI. Development, testing and issuing of a series of questions for parents of children with disabilities and preparation of a report on the results;
- VII. Identification of key stakeholders (including parents) for consultation;
- VIII. Facilitation of an Open Policy Debate with these stakeholders in conjunction with DCYA and DES.

I am very grateful to the National Disability Authority (NDA) for its assistance in managing this process on behalf of both Departments. The NDA has compiled a report of the evidence, the findings of the survey, and findings of the Open Policy Debate. This report has been received and is now being considered by the DCYA and the DES. I hope to be in a position to bring forward proposals in the very near future.

Early Childhood Care and Education

1160. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if the cases

of persons (details supplied) will be reviewed; the reason both children are not entitled to two free preschool years; if changes are proposed to legislation to deal with these cases; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36171/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): From September 2018, all children meeting the minimum age requirement of 2 years and 8 months will be eligible for a full two programme years on the Early Childhood Care and Education programme (ECCE). This measure refines the development introduced last year and increases the duration of each registered child on ECCE from an average of 61 weeks, to a duration of 76 weeks or two complete programme years. This delivers fully on a commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government that is good for children, families and Early Years providers.

This minimum age was chosen based on national experience and a review of international practice. It also had regard to the regulatory environment for early years care and education in this country and issues such as child development readiness and adult-child ratios. The upper age limit for the ECCE programme will remain the same (i.e. a child is not eligible if they will be 5 years and 6 months before the end of the programme year).

In order for a child to be eligible to be enrolled for the ECCE 2018/2019 childcare programme to begin on 1st September 2018, they must have been born between 1st January 2014 and 31st December 2015, i.e. they must have reached 2 years and 8 months on or before 31 August 2018.

In the examples cited by the Deputy, these children born in January and March 2016 will not be able to commence their ECCE in September 2018 as they will not have reached the minimum age of 2 years and 8 months on or before 31st August 2018. However, they will be able to commence ECCE in September 2019, and if they decide to do so continue for a further year from September 2020, commencing school in September 2021 thus availing of the full 2 years.

Some families of children born around this time of the year may prefer for their children to start school at 4 rather than 5. These families may therefore opt for one year of ECCE only. This decision is entirely at the discretion of the parent(s) or guardian but it is important to reiterate that two full years of ECCE provision is available to all children.

In such circumstances, it should be noted that the new universal subsidy of up to €1,040 per year, is available to parents of children in registered childcare until the child is eligible for ECCE. Please see affordablechildcare.ie for more information.

Departmental Correspondence

1161. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if correspondence from a person (details supplied) has been received and examined; and if a response has been issued. [36283/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I can confirm that the correspondence referred to by the Deputy was received in my Department on the 8th of August. While a number of issues raised in the letter fall to be dealt with by other Government Departments, I can inform the Deputy that an official in my Department contacted the correspondent by phone to discuss issues raised in the letter that fall under the remit of my Department. I can also confirm that a written response to the letter was issued on the 4th of September.

Departmental Communications

1162. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the positions in her Department and the organisations under its aegis that have arrangements in place for lo-call numbers or 1800, 1850 and 1890 telephone numbers for members of the public to contact her Department or organisations under its aegis; the number of these that are completely free to call for persons who use mobile telephones and may incur major bills telephoning such organisations; if the situation will be reviewed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36393/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department does not currently utilise any lo-call or freephone numbers for members of the public to contact the Department directly.

While the use of such numbers by agencies or organisations under the remit of my Department is an operational matter, I can confirm that the Oberstown Children Detention Campus and the Adoption Authority of Ireland do not use lo-call or freephone contact numbers. Tusla has confirmed that its adoption services operate a lo-call 1890 number for information and tracing services.

The Mother and Baby Homes Commission of Investigation has an 1800 free phone number in place which is free from a landline or mobile in the Republic of Ireland.

I have referred the question to the Office of the Ombudsman for Children for direct reply to the Deputy.

Departmental Properties

1163. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the annual rental cost of buildings rented by her Department or organisations under its aegis at a location (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36431/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Department of Children and Youth Affairs can confirm that the Department or any of the organisations under its aegis does not have any buildings rented at the location referred to by the Deputy.

Child and Family Agency Staff

1164. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of whole-time equivalent social work posts per Tusla region; the number of whole-time equivalent vacancies by region; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36444/18]

1170. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of unfilled vacant posts in Tusla by title; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36808/18]

1171. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of social care workers hired in each of the years 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018; the number of social care workers who have left their positions in each of the years 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36809/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1164, 1170 and 1171 together.

The latest information requested by the Deputies is not readily available. My officials have requested the information from Tusla and I will forward the reply to the Deputies once I have been furnished with it.

Children in Care

1165. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs when the findings of the national review panel in relation to the experiences of three young women while in the care of the State in County Galway commenced in 2016 will be available; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36491/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am informed by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, that the anticipated completion date for the National Review Panel's report is October 2018.

The report will provide the findings of the review of three cases of child abuse in County Galway by the National Review Panel. The Panel is independent in its work, and the panel members for these cases have significant expertise in child protection, foster care and child sexual abuse. Once the report is completed, Tusla will act on identified areas for learning and any recommendations made.

Detention Centres Data

1166. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if there are two outstanding reports (details supplied) on Oberstown Detention Centre; when the contents will be published; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36546/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Deputy refers to two reports - an investigation by the Office of the Ombudsman for Children and the Operational Review of Oberstown Children Detention Campus commissioned by the Board of Management of Oberstown in September 2016.

The Ombudsman for Children is currently undertaking an investigation in relation to Oberstown under the Ombudsman for Children Act 2002. This Act provides that where the Ombudsman for Children conducts an investigation under the Act, he shall send a statement of the result of the investigation to the public body concerned and to the relevant the Department of State. The investigation has not concluded and I can confirm that my Department has not received this statement as yet.

The final report of the Operational Review of Oberstown Children Detention Campus that was commissioned by the Board of Management of Oberstown was received in February 2017. The full recommendations from this report were published in July 2017.

I am monitoring the progress of the implementation of the recommendations from this report and a number of other reviews which were commissioned at the same time. In this regard, I established a Review Implementation Group which began work in March 2017. The Group prepared a report in December 2017, which contained the collated recommendations from all of the reviews. The updated Action Plan from the Review Implementation Group was completed in May 2018 and was published on my Department's website. A key priority for the Department is the implementation of key recommendations to bring about improvements in standards, which is now well underway.

The Operational Review was carried out following a particularly difficult time in Oberstown. However, I am advised by Oberstown management that the environment in Oberstown is now more stable. There is evidence of positive change in the day to day operations. I met with some young people when I visited Oberstown on a number of occasions in recent months. These young people were anxious that it be known that there are many positives about Oberstown. Given the passage of time it is considered that it would be misleading to publish the report now, having regard to progress that has been achieved in the interim.

Additionally, it is imperative that those commissioning the report must be satisfied that fair procedures were applied before publication. I have received a number of legal advices in relation to publication of the report of the Operational Review of Oberstown Children Detention Campus, the most recent of which was received in April 2018. I wished to be assured that fair procedures had been followed in relation to all persons referred to in the report, before it can be published. I sought assurance from the Board that it was satisfied that fair procedures were applied. The Board has not been in a position to provide such assurances to date and on this basis it is not proposed to publish the report.

As part of its recent inspection of Oberstown, HIQA was invited to review the report. It is expected that HIQA will consider any issues and concerns in its inspection report as appropriate.

Early Years Sector

1167. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the annual cost of the various childcare programmes across her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36598/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The overall allocation for Early Years Care and Education in 2018 is €484.8m.

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs utilises this funding to operate a number of childcare programmes which are administered by Pobal on behalf of the Department. These are listed below along with details of the 2018 allocations. Yearly costs can fluctuate as demand for the schemes can increase or decrease. Data on the actual 2018 spend will be available later in the year. The balance of funding is used for various developments, quality initiatives and supports.

- €306m - ECCE / free preschool programme
- €25.0m – The Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) for children with disabilities attending ECCE
- €79m - Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) programme
- €6.5m - Childcare Employment and Training Support (CETS) programme
- €0.9m - Afterschool Childcare Initiative
- €3.6m – Community Employment (CE) Childcare programme.

Early Childhood Care and Education Programmes

1168. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if the decision to reduce the two entry points to the ECCE scheme that existed in January and April 2018 to one annual entry point from September each year (details supplied) will be reviewed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36613/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Age limits have been used to determine eligibility since the inception of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme in 2010. These rules are a necessary component of any Government scheme and ensure that Exchequer funding is used for its intended purpose. In 2010, only one ECCE year, or 38 weeks, was available. This was enhanced in 2016 and, on average, children benefitted from 61 weeks. From September 2018, the additional investment secured in Budget 2018 will enable all children from the age of 2 years and 8 months to be eligible for two programme years.

The number of entry points is reverting to one at the beginning of the 2018/2019 programme year (September). The three ECCE entry points which were available for the years 2016/2017 and 2017/2018, created disruption for both service providers and parents seeking a childcare place for their child. One enrolment period at the start of the pre-school year will help streamline the administration process and will make it easier for childcare providers to operate and budget for the programme year. One entry point will also make it simpler for parents to secure places on the ECCE programme for their children.

I do, however, fully accept that the use of age limits in a scheme such as this creates a situation whereby a child can fall just outside the age range. Although my Department is examining all options around this issue, there are no immediate plans to revise the ECCE rules beyond the changes being introduced this month. A consideration of any future change would need to have regard to a wide range of issues as to what is in the best interests of all of the children participating in the scheme.

Some families of children may prefer for their children to start school at 4 rather than 5. These families may therefore opt for one year of ECCE only. This decision is entirely at the discretion of the parent(s) or guardian but it is important to reiterate that two full years of ECCE provision is available to all children.

In such circumstances, it should be noted that the new universal subsidy of up to €1,040 per year, is available to parents of children in registered childcare until the child is eligible for ECCE. Please see affordablechildcare.ie for more information.

Child and Family Agency Expenditure

1169. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the monthly amount spent by Tusla on agency staff in 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36807/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla has advised that the average monthly spend on Agency Staff for 2016, 2017, and to date in 2018 is as follows:

	2016	2017	2018 YTD July
	€'m	€'m	€'m
Agency Pay	18.622	25.216	17.646
Average Monthly	1.552	2.101	2.521

Questions Nos. 1170 and 1171 answered with Question No. 1164.

Family Support Services

1172. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of family support workers working with homeless families; the number of families per worker; if families in homeless accommodation are awaiting allocation of a family support worker; if so, the length of time; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36810/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I wish to thank the Deputy for his question, and can confirm that I have referred the matter to Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, for their direct reply.

Adoption Authority of Ireland

1173. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs when her attention was first drawn to the fact that the Adoption Authority of Ireland sent three reports on illegal birth registrations to her Department; if she has received those reports; her views in respect of those reports; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36976/18]

1179. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the occasions the attention of her Department was drawn by the Adoption Authority of Ireland to the possibilities of illegal registration; when the attention of her Department or her predecessors were drawn to this; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36982/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1173 and 1179 together.

I am aware the Adoption Authority of Ireland has made a number of reports to my Department on the issue of illegal birth registrations.

The Adoption Authority of Ireland undertook a review in 2010 of cases where information had been received through the National Adoption Contact Preference Register but where no adoption order existed. It carried out a cross referencing exercise with the GRO on these cases. Based on this process there was a concern in relation to illegal birth registrations in these and a number of other cases.

However, it has not to date been possible for the Adoption Authority of Ireland to reach the high level of certainty, following a rigorous process, that these individuals' births were in fact illegally registered as was achieved by Tusla in relation to the recent 126 Saint Patrick's Guild cases.

In the case of Saint Patrick's Guild, it was possible to identify and corroborate illegal registrations on the basis of the information on the files, and in particular the marker "adopted from birth".

The process for the potential cases identified by the AAI is not as straightforward. It may not be possible to identify a record in each case, as the only records in the possession of the Adoption Authority are domestic adoption records from 1953 and a small number of records from former adoption societies. If such records do exist for a case, there is no guarantee that the

same level of evidence exists would be on the file which would allow the Adoption Authority of Ireland or Tusla to be satisfied to the same high level of certainty in the Saint Patrick's Guild cases that these individuals' births were in fact illegally registered.

However following the emergence of the Saint Patrick's Guild cases, I asked the Adoption Authority of Ireland to carry out a further review of their cases to see if further facts can be established. It will carry out this work with the assistance of Tusla.

Adoption Registration

1174. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to address the illegal birth registrations discovered in view of the fact many are mature adults; the reason social workers are required in respect of such cases as opposed to providing for the proper registration of these false birth registrations; her plans to address these issues; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36977/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As the Deputy is aware, Tusla is actively engaged in the process of contacting those individuals affected by the recent discovery of evidence of incorrect registration in the St. Patrick's Guild records. People have the right to know of their true origins and, where we have clear evidence, I have stated that I believe we have an obligation to tell the people affected.

It is vital that this process is a social work-led process as this is potentially life-changing information that needs to be imparted sensitively and in a measured, supportive way. Some individuals may know already, but for others it will be entirely new and very difficult information to receive and absorb. The process of offering contact and support to those affected is being handled very carefully by Tusla on a case-by-case basis, applying best social work professional practice, and utilising experienced Tusla information and tracing social work staff.

I am aware of the complexity of issues that may arise for individuals receiving this life-changing information and I have already indicated my willingness to address the issues as they arise, with my Cabinet colleagues as required.

Adoption Registration

1175. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if the Adoption Authority of Ireland audit or the National Adoption Contact Register will identify the likely number of persons affected by false birth registration; the years covered by this analysis; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36978/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I take it that the Deputy is referring to the review of adoption records that I requested be undertaken, in the first instance, to establish whether there is sufficient reliable evidence of the practice of incorrect registration that can be extracted from the records of adoption agencies.

This Review is not an audit of the National Adoption Contact Register. It is a targeted sampling exercise of adoption records within the custody of the State, i.e. with the AAI and Tusla.

The terms of reference of the review have been published on the website of my Department, and the report will be submitted to me by mid October.

It is impossible to say, at present, whether the review report will identify the likely number

of persons affected by false birth registrations. The report will relate to the sample reviewed, and the findings of the report will assist me to make a decision about the necessary next steps.

Adoption Registration

1176. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the institutions and agencies, nursing homes, religious bodies and so on which have been identified as carrying out illegal birth registrations; the period of time this encompasses; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36979/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The State must reach a high level of certainty that an illegal birth registration has taken place before contacting the individuals concerned. While there have been suspicions about the practice of illegal registrations for many years, that threshold of certainty has to date only been reached in the case of the 126 Saint Patrick's Guild cases that I announced in May of this year. Those cases spanned the years 1946 to 1969.

The Deputy will be aware that a process is now being undertaken in order to establish whether there is sufficient reliable evidence of the practice of incorrect registration that can be extracted from the records of adoption agencies. There are an estimated 150,000 relevant records; these records are from the agencies, bodies and institutions historically involved with adoption and informal adoption. Approximately 100,000 of these records are currently in the custody of the State. The intention is that the Review will provide information to assist me to reach a decision about what subsequent action might be required to identify more fully the scale of incorrect birth registrations.

Adoption Registration

1177. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she now plans to hold a full scale audit of adoption records with a view to determining the number of adoption records that may be false and misleading, including illegal registration of births; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36980/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Deputy will be aware of the analysis of adoption records that is currently being undertaken under my instruction. An exercise to see if the extent of incorrect registrations of birth can be established has commenced. The independent Chair, Ms. Marion Reynolds, is overseeing a process whereby the Adoption Authority of Ireland and Tusla are analysing a sample of relevant records in their custody. There are an estimated 150,000 relevant records in existence and, of these, approximately 100,000 are currently in the custody of the State. The review will focus on those relevant records in the custody of the State.

The purpose of the review is to establish whether there is sufficient reliable evidence of the practice of incorrect registration that can be extracted from the records of adoption agencies. The sampling exercise will provide information to assist me to reach a decision about what subsequent action might be required to identify more fully the scale of incorrect birth registrations.

The report of the review is due to be submitted to me by mid October.

The full terms of reference of the review are on my Department's website.

Adoption Registration

1178. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if evidence in a recent court case as far back as 2001 regarding patients of St. Patrick's Guild that illegal registration had been made for children is now being accepted; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36981/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): It is not clear what court case the Deputy is referring to, but I am assuming that the reference is to a recent High Court case relating to St Patrick's Guild. This case was settled and no judgement issued. In the absence of a judgement the issue of accepting evidence does not arise.

The State has a responsibility to reach a high level of certainty that there is in fact evidence that births were illegally registered before it contacts the individuals concerned. This threshold was reached in the 126 cases which Tusla are dealing with. I am very aware of the complexity of issues that may arise for individuals receiving this life-changing information and I intend to address these issues as they arise.

Question No. 1179 answered with Question No. 1173.

Adoption Records Provision

1180. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on whether as a civil and human right, adopted persons that are now adults should have full access to adoption records and files; when she will proceed with legislation to provide for this; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36983/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am keenly aware of the importance of identity and of the significance for adopted people of access to their adoption records and early life information.

The Adoption (Information and Tracing) Bill 2016, which, as the Deputy knows, passed Second Stage in the Seanad last year, will for the first time give adopted persons and other relevant individuals, birth parents and relatives a statutory right to an information and tracing service. The Bill provides for all adoption records to be brought into the custody of the State and will create offences for the concealment, destruction, mutilation or falsification of such records. It recognises the fundamental importance of access to adoption records and information for adopted persons and for their families into the future and is based on a presumption in favour of disclosing information in so far as is legally and constitutionally possible.

I have been clear that my intention is that the Bill will be enacted by the end of the year. I look forward to engaging with members of this House and of the Seanad so that all of us who wish to see this Bill implemented as soon as possible can work together to achieve this.

Adoption Data

1181. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the estimated number of persons adopted here prior to the Adoption Act 1952; the number which were adoptions of Irish children that were arranged for families in the United States of America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom since 1952; the number of adoptions from 1922 to 1952; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36984/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Adoption Act 1952 established a statutory basis for adoption in Ireland and provided for the establishment of the Adoption Board, which is now the Adoption Authority of Ireland. The Authority holds all the records relating to domestic adoptions in Ireland from 1953 to the present day, which number approximately 45,000. Prior to 1952 there was no legal basis for adoption in Ireland.

My Department does not hold statistics in relation to children who may have travelled from Ireland to be adopted abroad. However the Department is aware that there are records relating to this practice in the Department of Foreign Affairs.

The Adoption (Information and Tracing) Bill 2016 provides for the Adoption Authority of Ireland to be responsible for collecting, restoring, preserving and safekeeping adoption records, including information relating to informal adoptions and persons whose birth was illegally registered.

The Adoption (Information and Tracing) Bill 2016 has passed Second Stage in the Seanad and it is my intention that the Bill will be enacted by the end of the year.

Adoption Data

1182. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs when the scoping exercise into adoption was commenced by her Department; the number of adoption cases likely to be examined; if the adoption board, AAI, relevant Government Departments and their predecessors will be subject to examination; when she expects to examine the findings of the scoping report; the person carrying out the scoping exercise; the qualifications they have; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36986/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Following the discovery of clear evidence of incorrect registration in the St. Patrick's Guild records, I directed that an analysis of adoption records be carried out to establish whether there is sufficient reliable evidence of the practice of incorrect registration that can be extracted from the records of adoption agencies.

This review is being overseen independently by Marion Reynolds. Ms. Reynolds (MBE, Bsc, Dip Soc Work, CQSW, Cert Adv Soc Work) is a former Deputy Director of Social Services in Northern Ireland. She has worked since 1975 at practitioner, management, inspection, policy development and commissioning levels in family and child care services in Northern Ireland. She now provides independent analysis and reports for a range of social service providers in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

The first meeting between Ms. Reynolds and the nominated representatives from Tusla and the Adoption Authority of Ireland took place in mid- June and I expect the final report within four months, i.e. by mid-October.

There are an estimated 150,000 adoption records in existence and, of these, approximately 100,000 are currently in the custody of the State. The review is focused on records in the custody of the State and a targeted sampling exercise is being carried out in the first instance owing to the volume of records involved. This targeted review will help to establish the extent of usable information that can be found in these historical records. The review will provide information to assist me in identifying more fully the scale of incorrect birth registrations.

The full terms of reference of the review are available on my Department's website.

Adoption Data

1183. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of adoption records held by the State by category (details supplied) at which babies were given up for adoption; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36987/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Adoption Authority of Ireland holds all the records relating to domestic adoptions in Ireland from 1953 to the present day, of which are approximately 45,000. In addition there are approximately 100,000 records in the care of Tusla and the Adoption Authority of Ireland from former adoption societies.

While the records the Deputy has referenced are not adoption records, the Adoption (Information and Tracing) Bill 2016 provides for the Adoption Authority of Ireland to be responsible for collecting, restoring, preserving and safekeeping of adoption records, including information relating to informal adoptions and persons whose birth was illegally registered. It is possible that a number of these records of those institutions referenced in the Deputy's question, to the extent that they are relevant records under the legislation, will come in to the custody of the State under this legislation, if they are not already.

The Adoption (Information and Tracing) Bill 2016 has passed Second Stage in the Seanad and it is my intention that the Bill will be enacted by the end of the year.

Adoption Data

1184. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the estimated number of siblings placed in fosterage or adoption; if her Department sought to provide for the reunification of separated siblings; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36989/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am advised by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, that figures on the number of siblings placed in foster care are not centrally collated at this time. The National Standards for Foster Care specify that siblings should be placed together where this is in their interest and within the advised limits of the number of children that can be placed in a foster home.

When a child enters foster care, the assessed needs and best interests of the child are Tusla's primary concern.

Placement of sibling groups in foster care requires special consideration. Tusla aims to prioritise the placing of sibling groups together in foster care through the matching of children's assessed needs with that of the carers. The assessment of need will indicate the needs of the child in relation to their sibling group and will support the matching process between the child/siblings with the foster carers.

In the event that sibling groups are not placed together Tusla will endeavour to support placements within the same community or as close as possible to allow for regular contact.

Care planning for siblings entering, or about to enter care should assess the relationship between siblings, along with the needs and best interests of the children, and determine whether placing together or separately is the most appropriate option. A decision to place siblings separately must be supported by substantial evidence that such a placement is in the best interests of the children involved.

Local Authority Finances

1185. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the allocation to each local authority for community development functions in 2017 and 2018. [35417/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The information requested is currently being compiled by my Department and will be provided to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Walks Scheme

1186. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if his attention has been drawn to a request by an organisation (details supplied) for increased allocation of funding for the walks scheme, doubling the funding from €2 million to €4 million; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35763/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): My Department administers the Walks Scheme which facilitates the development and maintenance of many of Ireland's walking trails. The scheme involves landholders as key participants in the provision of high quality walking trails, by contracting them to undertake maintenance work on sections of National Waymarked Ways and other priority walks that traverse their lands. The landholders receive modest payments for maintenance work undertaken, in line with agreed work plans.

The scheme currently covers 39 trails, with payments made to approximately 1,900 landholders to maintain those trails.

The Programme for a Partnership Government includes a commitment to double the number of walks included in the scheme, with a consequent increase in funding.

My officials have been looking at how best to expand the scheme and I anticipate that progress will be made by the end of the year in identifying a number of priority walks which might initially be added to the scheme. Consultation will take place with relevant landholders and other stakeholders in relation to the inclusion of any specific walks in the scheme.

Telecommunications Infrastructure

1187. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of local authorities that have been asked to map local blackspots to identify infrastructure that could potentially be used to provide additional coverage on an economical basis in respect of the coverage of mobile phone reception for both the 3G and 4G network; the number of these local authorities that have completed this process; the action being taken on foot of this to improve the service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35975/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Kyne): The Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce was established in July 2016 to examine broadband and mobile phone coverage deficits in Ireland and identify tangible actions to improve the quality of these services.

The Taskforce Report was published in December 2016, encompassing 40 actions to allevi-

ate barriers to mobile phone reception and broadband access. An Implementation Group was established in 2017 to oversee the delivery of the actions in the Taskforce's report. Progress reports on the delivery of these actions are published on my Department's website on a quarterly basis.

With regard to the specific issue of mobile phone black spots, my officials, in conjunction with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, are actively engaged with Local Authorities and mobile phone operators to identify priority black spots and take action to address this issue.

During 2017, officials of both Departments worked with a group of Local Authorities to identify the issues associated with mapping local black spots. Building on this exercise, a call was issued to all Local Authorities in 2018 to map local black spots and identify infrastructure that could potentially be used to improve telecommunications services.

To date, 17 Local Authorities have provided data on more than 200 black spots, although it should be borne in mind that the number of black spots is constantly changing as new telecommunications infrastructure is rolled out and upgraded. The black spot information that the Department has received so far is providing data regarding poor coverage in specific rural areas and along national and regional roads. The Department is continuing to work with the telecommunications providers to ensure that new infrastructure is targeted at the areas most in need.

In addition, I understand that a Focus Group was established earlier this year by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment to provide guidance with respect to categories of location where high quality reliable mobile coverage should be made available as a priority. The report of the Focus Group was published in August 2018 and sets out a ranked list of categories of location where high quality mobile coverage should be available, and recommends the level (in terms of quality and reliability) of coverage needed for these locations with respect to mobile voice and data services.

Dormant Accounts Fund Administration

1188. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the way in which individual clubs can apply for dormant accounts funding through the various departments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35461/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Kyne): The 2018 Dormant Accounts Action Plan, which was published in July, approved funding of up to €39.7 million for 45 different measures across ten different Government Departments.

In line with the provisions of the Dormant Accounts Acts, the measures identified in the Action Plan target social, economic and educational disadvantage; and people with a disability. The approved measures will support a wide range of projects and programmes relating to issues such as social inclusion, assisting migrants, support for carers, speech and language therapy, support for dementia sufferers and sports measures. The majority of measures will commence in 2019, subject to voted expenditure being available within each relevant Department.

With regard to the ways in which individual organisations can apply for funding, it is a matter for each relevant Department as to how they deliver their own measures. Within my own Department the social enterprise measure, which is administered by Pobal, has recently invited applications for capital funding from social enterprises addressing disadvantage and disability through their work. I am also aware that, for example, under the sports related measures deliv-

ered through the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, Sport Ireland periodically invites applications for possible projects and programmes from the National Governing Bodies, Local Sports Partnerships and other agencies directly involved with disadvantage and disability.

Town and Village Renewal Scheme

1189. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of town and village renewal scheme applications in County Kildare. [35930/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The 2018 Town and Village Renewal Scheme was launched on 27th April last. The scheme is funded by my Department and administered through the Local Authorities.

Under the scheme, Local Authorities were required to seek expressions of interest from communities for project proposals and were invited to select up to 12 proposals for submission to my Department for consideration. The closing date for submission of applications to the Department was 30th June 2018.

My Department received 290 applications in total under the scheme, including 8 applications from Kildare County Council. My officials are currently assessing all applications received and it is anticipated that the successful projects will be announced by the end of September. Projects will be expected to commence by the end of the year and to be completed within a period of up to 18 months.

Over €31.6 million has been approved for more than 450 projects across the country under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme since it was introduced in the second half of 2016. It is anticipated that at a further €15 million in funding will be approved under the 2018 scheme for up to 200 projects.

The Town and Village Renewal Scheme is an important part of the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development. The Government's commitment to supporting rural Ireland is further underscored through the new €1 billion Rural Regeneration and Development Fund which was launched recently. This new Fund will provide an opportunity to deliver more integrated and ambitious projects which will further support the revitalisation of our rural towns and villages in the coming years.

Town and Village Renewal Scheme

1190. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of town and village renewal scheme applications in County Laois [35931/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The 2018 Town and Village Renewal Scheme was launched on 27th April last. The scheme is funded by my Department and administered through the Local Authorities.

Under the scheme, Local Authorities were required to seek expressions of interest from communities for project proposals and were invited to select up to 12 proposals for submission to my Department for consideration. The closing date for submission of applications to the Department was 30th June 2018.

My Department received 290 applications in total under the scheme, including 12 from Laois County Council. My officials are currently assessing all applications received and it is

anticipated that the successful projects will be announced by the end of September. Projects will be expected to commence by the end of the year and to be completed within a period of up to 18 months.

Over €31.6 million has been approved for more than 450 projects across the country under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme since it was introduced in the second half of 2016. It is anticipated that a further €15 million in funding will be approved under the 2018 scheme for up to 200 projects.

The Town and Village Renewal Scheme is an important part of the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development. The Government's commitment to supporting rural Ireland is further underscored through the new €1 billion Rural Regeneration and Development Fund which was launched recently. This new Fund will provide an opportunity to deliver more integrated and ambitious projects which will further support the revitalisation of our rural towns and villages in the coming years.

CLÁR Programme

1191. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if funding will be provided for fully adapted transport for an organisation (details supplied) as part of its application for CLÁR funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36234/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The aim of CLÁR is to support the sustainable development of designated areas which have suffered significant levels of depopulation in the past, with the aim of encouraging people to continue to live and work in those areas. The programme has funded a number of measures over the last two years which support this objective.

On the 8th August last, I announced details of a Mobility and Cancer Care Transport measure under the Department's CLÁR Programme. This new €1.5 million measure will support the purchase of vehicles by voluntary organisations in CLÁR areas that provide:

- transport to/from designated cancer treatment hospitals/centres under the National Cancer Care Programme, or

- transport for people with significant mobility issues to day care or other medical, therapeutic or respite services, including those requiring specialised wheelchair accessible vehicles.

The measure will support applications of up to €50,000 for a wheelchair accessible vehicle and up to €100,000 for a bus. CLÁR will provide up to 85% of the total cost of such vehicles, including fit-out. Matching funding of at least 15% is required from other sources. The closing date for applications under the measure was 31st August 2018.

I can confirm that an application was received in respect of the group referred to by the Deputy. My officials are currently assessing all applications received and I hope to be in a position to announce the successful applications in the coming weeks.

Departmental Communications

1192. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the position in his Department and the organisations under its aegis that have arrangements in place for lo-call numbers or 1800, 1850 and 1890 phone numbers for members of the public to

contact his Department or organisations under its aegis; the number of these that are completely free to call to persons that use mobile phones and may incur major bills phoning such organisations; if the situation will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36405/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): My Department receives ICT and telephony services via an agreement with the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer and as such all Departmental numbers use the 076 prefix, where calls are charged as a national call from landlines or mobiles. My Department has no separate arrangements in place for the use of lo-call or 1800, 1850 and 1890 numbers.

In respect of the agencies under the aegis of my Department, Irish Water Safety (IWS) has an arrangement in place for an 1890 number for callers from fixed line numbers, however there is also a standard 091-area number which mobile phone users can contact at the standard rate charged by their service provider or within their bundled minutes package.

Charities Regulation

1193. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the estimated cost in 2019 if the budget for the Charities Regulatory Authority increased by 12.5%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36424/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Kyne): The Charities Regulatory Authority has been allocated €4.552m in 2018. A 12.5% increase in this amount would lead to an allocation of €5.121m. However, the allocations for 2019 for my Department are subject to the ongoing 2019 Estimates discussions and will be agreed upon in due course.

Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme

1194. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development when funding allocations under measure 2 of the outdoor recreational scheme will be announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36513/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme is part of the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development and provides funding for the development of new outdoor recreational infrastructure or the necessary maintenance, enhancement or promotion of existing outdoor recreational infrastructure in Ireland.

On 28th May last, I announced details of €12 million in funding for Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure under three separate measures:

- Measure 1: Small maintenance/promotion of existing infrastructure (maximum grant €20,000)
- Measure 2: Medium scale repair/upgrade and development of new small/medium infrastructure (maximum grant €200,000), and
- Measure 3: Repair/upgrade and development of larger more strategic projects (grant of between €200,001 and €500,000).

The closing date for applications under Measure 1 was Friday 6th July 2018, and for Mea-

asures 2 and 3 the closing date was Friday 27th July 2018. Applications under the scheme are currently being assessed and I hope to announce successful projects under Measure 1 in the coming weeks with similar announcements under Measures 2 and 3 to follow.

Leader Programmes Expenditure

1195. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the breakdown between total funds expended on administration costs and the total amount on project costs on the Leader programme in each year of the 2014-2020 rural development programme and to date in 2018. [36936/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): LEADER is a multi-annual programme for the period 2014-2020 and has a total budget of €250 million over that period. Table 1 below details the expenditure incurred in each of the years 2015 to 2017, and to date in 2018. This expenditure relates to:

- the cost incurred by the Local Action Groups (LAGs), who administer the programme, in preparing and developing their Local Development Strategies,
- the administration costs of the LAGs and the costs of their engagement with communities to generate projects; and,
- expenditure incurred on projects.

The level of project activity under the LEADER programme has increased significantly in recent months, and 1,265 projects have now been approved for funding to a value of almost €38.4 million. A further 335 project applications with a combined value in excess of €20 million are at various stages in the approval process.

I expect the level of expenditure on projects to increase substantially in the coming months as these projects are implemented and the promoters submit claims for payment.

Table 1: LEADER 2014-2020 Expenditure by year as of 4th September 2018

	Preparatory Support Costs	Administration Costs	Projects	Total Programme Expenditure
2015	€1,251,185.25	€0.00	€0.00	€1,251,185.25
2016	€119,785.45	€1,141,135.09	€0.00	€1,260,920.54
2017	€97,141.59	€11,364,865.35	€661,844.12	€12,123,851.06
2018	€0.00	€6,250,814.56	€4,917,864.15	€11,168,678.71
Total	€1,468,112.29	€18,756,815.00	€5,579,708.27	€25,804,635.56

Rural Development Programme Funding

1196. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the financial allocations on an annual basis under the 2014-2020 rural development programme as per measure 19 support for Leader local development; the annual amount expended on the programme in each year of the rural development programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36937/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): LEADER,

which is referred to at EU level as Measure 19, forms part of Ireland's Rural Development Programme 2014-2020. Ireland's LEADER programme has a total budget of €250 million over the period to 2020. €220 million of this funding has been allocated to the Local Action Groups (LAGs) throughout the country who deliver the LEADER programme. The remaining €30 million is available for schemes which will be delivered at a national level.

The funding which has been allocated to the LAGs is provided for the whole duration of the programme, rather than on an annual basis. This provides greater flexibility to the LAGs in managing their resources.

Table 1 below details the funding allocations provided to LAGs by county under the 2014-2020 LEADER programme. The LEADER areas are, in the main, aligned with the county boundaries. However, County Cork includes three LEADER sub-regional areas.

Table 2 details the overall expenditure incurred each year to date under the programme.

Project approvals under LEADER have increased significantly this year and a total of 1,265 projects have now been approved by the LAGs for funding of almost €38.4 million. A further 335 projects with a combined value in excess of €20 million are currently within the approvals process. The level of project expenditure under the programme is therefore expected to increase significantly as payment claims are submitted to my Department through the LAGs in respect of these projects.

Table 1: LEADER 2014-2020 Allocations per County

County	Programme Allocation (€)
Carlow	6,416,803.43
Cavan	8,522,285.84
Clare	8,920,224.65
Cork	13,938,823.22
Donegal	12,913,877.86
Dublin	6,370,438.43
Galway	12,195,883.61
Kerry	10,219,868.29
Kildare	5,261,600.01
Kilkenny	7,791,572.91
Laois	7,124,586.86
Leitrim	5,998,474.74
Limerick	9,276,593.96
Longford	7,597,623.07
Louth	6,101,862.01
Mayo	11,121,431.88
Meath	6,903,123.57
Monaghan	7,592,719.51
Offaly	8,036,763.90
Roscommon	8,852,659.22
Sligo	7,655,647.81
Tipperary	10,103,443.28
Waterford	7,522,796.18
Westmeath	7,384,206.22

Wexford	9,840,140.56
Wicklow	6,336,549.00
TOTAL	€220,000,000

Table 2: LEADER 2014-2020 Expenditure broken down per year

	Total Programme Expenditure
2015	€1,251,185.25
2016	€1,260,920.54
2017	€12,123,851.06
2018	€11,168,678.71
Total	€25,804,635.56

Departmental Expenditure

1197. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the amount allocated by current and capital expenditure in 2018 to schemes (details supplied). [36938/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): My Department operates a suite of programmes designed to support rural communities. These include the Town and Village Renewal Scheme, the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme, the CLÁR programme, the Local Improvement Scheme and the Walks Scheme.

Table 1 below provides details of the current and capital allocations announced under these programmes to date in 2018. In the case of schemes for which announcements are pending, the projected indicative allocation is provided.

In most cases, projects supported under these programmes run over a 12-18 month period from the time the funding is approved. Expenditure under the 2018 programmes will therefore be incurred over the 2018 and 2019 financial years.

However, projects under the Local Improvement Scheme are expected to be completed in 2018, while the Walks Scheme provides annual funding for the maintenance of sections of 39 trails that traverse private lands.

Table 1 – Rural programmes, 2018 allocations

Programme	Current Expenditure allocation	Capital Expenditure allocation	Total allocation
Town and Village Renewal scheme	-	€15m*	€15m
Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme	-	€14.2m**	€14.2m
CLÁR programme	-	€10.4m	€10.4m
Local Improvement Scheme	-	€10.84m	€10.84m
Walks Scheme	€2m	--	€2m

* Indicative allocation. Successful projects to be announced by end-September.

** Includes €2.2m allocated in January 2018 in respect of the 2017 programme call, and an indicative 2018 programme allocation of €12m.

Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance Scheme Data

1198. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons that did not receive an automatic payment of the back to school clothing and footwear allowance and that had to reapply in each of the years 2009 to 2017 and to date in 2018. [35937/18]

1199. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason those entitled to automatic payment of the back to school clothing and footwear allowance that may have to reapply are not informed of this prior to the release of the payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35938/18]

1200. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of back to school clothing and footwear allowance payments made on the assigned date of issue; and the number of persons that received it after this date. [35939/18]

1228. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons in receipt of the back to school clothing and footwear allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35959/18]

1254. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason for the delay in processing the back to school clothing and footwear allowance; the wait time for same; the number of applications to be processed; the date on which all applications will be processed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36259/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1198 to 1200, inclusive, and 1228 and 1254 together.

The back to school clothing and footwear allowance (BSCFA) scheme provides a once-off payment to eligible families to assist with the costs of clothing and footwear when children start or return to school each autumn. The Government has provided €49.5 million for the scheme in 2018.

The payment rates are €125 for eligible children aged 4 to 11 years and €250 for children aged over 12 years and attending secondary school.

Each year since 2010 in excess of 100,000 customers can be identified from the Department's computer system as having an automatic entitlement to the allowance so they are notified of their entitlement and there is no requirement for them to make an application. In addition, approximately 55,000 customers may have an entitlement but need to apply to have this entitlement assessed.

Similar to arrangements in previous years, the majority of this year's BSCFA payments for 104,461 families in respect of approximately 190,308 children were fully automated and parents were not required to make an application to the Department. The total amount paid to families with an automatic entitlement was €33.45m and these payments were made during the week commencing 9th July 2018.

In order to qualify for an automated payment the parent of the child must have been in receipt of a qualifying payment that included an increase in respect of a qualified child at the

commencement of the scheme and the Department were satisfied that the household satisfied the means test for the scheme. The scheme commenced from the 1st June 2018 with the entitlement created based on the preceding week's entitlement.

The Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance is a means-tested allowance. Qualifying for the allowance in a previous year does not in any way guarantee the customer will receive it in the current year and many customers, especially those who have had a change in their means or circumstance, will need to make an application for the payment for this year in order to have their entitlement validated. Customers with children aged 18 years or over will also need to apply and provide confirmation that they are in full-time second-level education. Therefore it is not possible prior to the release of the automatic payments to inform customers that they have no automatic entitlement to the payment.

Customers who may have received BSCFA in previous years and did not receive written confirmation of entitlement for this year by end June will need to make an application. Applications for Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance are open until 30 September and application forms are available to download from www.welfare.ie/forms or at local Intreo Centres. To request a form by post, the customer should text BSCFA1 followed by their name and address to 51909.

To date (5 September 2018) 130,339 families have been awarded the allowance, 5,642 have been refused and 10,470 are awaiting a decision. Up to 400 applications are being received on a daily basis. Expenditure to date on the scheme is €42.8m.

The BSCFA Area continues to experience delays in processing the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance (BSCFA). The delays have arisen as a result of a combination of technical issues, and a very high volume of new applications received since the beginning of July. However, I can assure you that all outstanding claims are being dealt with expeditiously.

Customers who are experiencing particular difficulties with back to school costs and have yet to receive the allowance can contact their local Community Welfare Service (CWS) to seek financial assistance by way of a basic Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA) which is fully recoupable from the BSCFA due.

The number of customers who received an automatic payment and those who were paid on foot of submitting an application in the years 2011 to date are set out in the attached tabular statement. All payments prior to 2011 were on foot of an application being submitted.

Year	Auto payments made in July	Manual payments	Total payments
2009	N/A	N/A	139,000
2010	N/A	N/A	162,000
2011	127,000	69,000	196,000
2012	115,000	70,000	185,000
2013	115,000	66,000	181,000
2014	113,000	54,000	167,000
2015	105,000	48,000	153,000
2016	109,000	45,000	154,000
2017	107,000	44,000	151,000
2018	104,000	26,000*	130,000*

*provisional

Employment Rights

1201. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the ratification of the International Labour Organisation's convention concerning decent work for domestic workers in August 2014 was the catalyst for the subsequent changes in the interpretation of the status of au pairs; if not, the point at which the status of an au pair was changed to be considered an employee; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36146/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Ireland's ratification of the ILO Convention No. 189 on Decent Work for Domestic Workers (the Domestic Workers Convention) in 2014 did not require any changes to our domestic legislation, as the existing body of employment rights legislation was fully compliant with the Convention. Therefore, ratification did not change anything in existing employment legislation or its interpretation. However, ratification presented an opportunity to raise awareness of the rights of domestic workers, and, to this end, the then National Employment Rights Authority (NERA) - which has since become part of the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) - published a booklet on the employment rights of domestic workers in Ireland to coincide with ratification. The Migrant Rights Centre of Ireland (MRCI) also used the opportunity to raise awareness of domestic workers' rights.

A "domestic worker" is defined in the Domestic Workers Convention as "any person engaged in domestic work within an employment relationship". Domestic work may involve a range of tasks, including cooking, cleaning a house, washing and ironing laundry, general housework, looking after children, the elderly or persons with disabilities, and maintaining gardens.

There is no legal definition of the term "au pair" in Irish legislation, and individuals described as "au pairs", "nannies" or "child-minders" are not exempted or treated as separate categories of workers under Irish employment law. Ireland's body of employment rights legislation protects all employees who are legally employed on an employer-employee basis, regardless of what title is given to them. Therefore, once it is clear that a person is working under a contract of employment, on a full-time or part-time basis, that person has the same protection under employment law as other employees. For example, the National Minimum Wage Act 2000 requires that any persons working under a contract of employment be paid the statutory National Minimum Wage. For the purposes of this Act, this means a contract of service or apprenticeship, or any other contract whereby an individual agrees with another person to do or perform personally any work or service for that person.

Where the WRC receive a complaint involving somebody described as an au pair, they will investigate with a view to establishing whether a person has statutory entitlements under employment law. The question as to whether a person is an employee or not is generally established by reference to the provisions of existing employment legislation and established contract law, regardless of any title or designation given to the individual. Complaints involving "au pairs" are considered on a case-by-case basis, in the light of the facts of each case.

Free Travel Scheme Eligibility

1202. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a travel pass for a person (details supplied) can be reinstated in view of recent policy changes to the free travel scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36707/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The current free travel scheme provides free travel on the main public and private transport services for those eligible under the scheme. These include road, rail and ferry services provided by companies such as Bus Átha Cliath, Bus Éireann and Iarnród Éireann, as well as Luas and services provided by over 80 private transport operators. There are currently approximately 914,000 customers with direct eligibility with an annual allocation of €90 million.

Persons resident in Ireland who are over 66 and persons in receipt of certain social welfare payments are eligible for the scheme. The social welfare payments that allow persons aged under 66 to a free travel pass include disability allowance, invalidity pension, carer's allowance and partial capacity benefit.

The "Make Work Pay" Initiative allows people with long term disability payment who move off the payment to get a job retain their Free Travel Card for a period of five years, providing all other qualifying conditions for the free travel scheme are satisfied.

The initiative came into effect from the 6th April 2017. Therefore only people who move off long term disability payment to get a job from this date can retain their Free Travel Card for a period of five years.

Any decision to amend this policy can only be considered in the context of overall budgetary negotiations.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Job Losses

1203. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the actions she has taken to protect jobs at a company (details supplied) and put supports in place for employees that will be made redundant; if she has spoken with the management of the company regarding these job losses; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36923/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I understand that the company in question has indicated it will phase out its operations in Sligo over the next few years. It has indicated that there will be no job losses this year and that the majority of its workers will remain in employment until 2020. Nevertheless, my Department has already taken steps to contact the company with a view to advising its workers of their social welfare entitlements if they are made redundant and the various employment supports that are available.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Appeals

1204. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the progress to date in the determination of an appeal for an invalidity pension in the case of a person (details supplied); if an oral hearing can be facilitated in this case; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35431/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 11th July 2018. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process

that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. When these papers have been received from the Department, the case in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral appeal hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals Status

1205. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35502/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer, having fully considered all of the available evidence, has partially allowed the appeal of the person concerned by way of a summary decision. The person concerned has been notified of the Appeals Officer's decision.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Applications

1206. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the progress to date in the determination of an application for an invalidity pension in the case of a person (details supplied); when the application is likely to be concluded; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35505/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Invalidity Pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

The Department received a claim for IP for the lady referred to on 25 May 2018. She was refused IP on the grounds that the medical conditions for the scheme were not satisfied. She was notified on the 21 August 2018 of this decision, the reasons for it and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

1207. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social

Protection when appeals in the case of a person (details supplied) will be heard; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35562/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that a carer's allowance appeal was registered in that office on 21st May 2018. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. When these papers have been received from the Department, the case in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral appeal hearing.

A jobseeker's allowance appeal was also registered in that office on 26th June 2018. The papers relating to this case were received in the Appeals Office on 31st July 2018. However, the file in question was subsequently recalled by the Department on enquiry. The Appeals Office is currently awaiting their response.

If the means of the person concerned are insufficient to meet his/her needs he/she should contact his/her local Intreo Office regarding his/her possible entitlement to supplementary welfare allowance.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Support Grant

1208. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the progress to date in the determination of an application for the carer's support grant in the case of a person (details supplied); when the application is likely to conclude; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35563/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): This application is currently being processed by my Department. In this regard, the Deciding Officer dealing with the claim recently wrote to the person concerned seeking further details of her employment and of the level of care she provides.

Once this information is received, the Deciding Officer will notify the customer of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Applications

1209. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the progress to date in the determination of an application for illness benefit and disability allowance in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35564/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Illness Benefit (IB) is a short term scheme intended for persons

who are unable to work due to illness or injury. It is paid while the incapacitated person remains unable to work and continues to meet the conditions of the scheme. There is, however, a maximum payment period of two years after which payment will cease.

The Person concerned made an IB claim in 17/09/16. This claim was awarded and in payment until the 28/08/18, at which point IB ceased payment as invalidity pension (INVP) was awarded.

The gentleman referred to submitted an application for INVP on 12 June 2018. He was awarded INVP with effect from 14 June 2018. The first payment issued to his nominated bank account on the 30 August 2018.

Any arrears due (less any overlapping social welfare payment) will issue in due course. The gentleman in question was notified of this decision on the 15 August 2018.

I confirm that my department received an application for disability allowance (DA) from this gentleman on 7 August 2018.

DA cannot be paid concurrently with INVP which is payable at a higher rate than DA. The application of the person concerned has been withdrawn as he is in receipt of a higher rate of payment.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Eligibility

1210. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the decision to cease disability allowance in the case of a person (details supplied) will be reviewed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35583/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Following a review of this lady's disability allowance (DA) claim, it was established that she had means not previously disclosed to this department. Her DA payment was disallowed or reduced for periods from 4 January 2017 to 27 February 2018, which resulted in an overpayment. She was notified of this decision and given the right to appeal it to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office. No appeal was received in this case.

My department is obliged to recoup any debt owing to it in an appropriate and timely manner. An agreed weekly deduction toward this debt has been deducted from the DA payments of the person concerned from 22 August 2018.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Eligibility

1211. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the decision to refuse an application for a disability allowance in the case of a person (details supplied) can be reviewed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35588/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): This lady submitted an application for disability allowance (DA)

on 18 April 2017. Her application was disallowed as she was not found to be habitually resident in the state.

She appealed this decision to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO). This appeal was disallowed by an appeals officer (AO) on 11 May 2018 and she was notified of this decision in writing on the same date.

An AO's decision is final and conclusive in absence of any new facts or evidence.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Exceptional Needs Payment Eligibility

1212. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a bereavement grant by way of an exceptional needs payment can be facilitated in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35596/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Designated Officer has not received an application for an Exceptional Needs Payment (ENP) from the person concerned to date.

If the person concerned wishes to make an application they should contact their nearest Community Welfare Services (CWS) where they will be provided with an application form. Alternatively, they can contact the CWS via E mail or telephone at cwsmaynoothleixlip@welfare.ie, phone 01-6106143.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Departmental Communications

1213. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if phone lines that are provided for Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas by her Department to make queries in relation to individuals, can transfer a query to discuss a person's case with either this Deputy, a secretarial assistant or parliamentary assistant without declining to discuss a matter by quoting GDPR regulations (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35622/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I confirm that a Member of the Houses of Oireachtas or their nominated assistant(s) may still discuss a query in relation to an individual with officials of this Department on the implicit understanding that the constituent has asked the Member to make enquiries on their behalf.

Section 40 of the Data Protection Act 2018 facilitates the processing of personal data and special categories of personal data by elected representatives.

Section 40 states that, for the purpose of enabling an elected representative to perform his or her functions as such a representative, the processing of personal data and special categories of personal data of a data subject by or on behalf of that representative shall be lawful where he or she receives a request or representation from the data subject.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Insurance Payments

1214. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the class S PRSI for a self-employed person that is 66 years of age can be used to satisfy the minimum 260 contribution weeks for the criteria necessary to qualify for the half-rate pension in view of the fact that they satisfy the minimum 520 paid contributions condition for the State pension (contributory) eligibility; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35635/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The self-employed have been obliged to pay social insurance since 1988. One of the eligibility requirements for the State Pension (contributory) is that a person's first paid social insurance contribution should be 10 years before they reach state pension age. As such, self-employed people who were over the age of 55 in 1988 could not meet that requirement, and did not qualify for a contributory state pension.

In April 1999, a special pro-rata pension was introduced for them. Only people aged 56 or over on 6 April 1988 (born on or before 6 April 1932) qualify for this pension.

A person with over 520 contributions, paid or credited, will be eligible for the State Pension (contributory). They may also be eligible for the means-tested State Pension (non-contributory). Persons can apply for both pensions and will be paid whichever rate is most beneficial to them.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Pensions Legislation

1215. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of the preparation of legislation to facilitate reviews for those in receipt of contributory pensions post-2012 that took time out to care for family; when these reviews will commence; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35675/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): On 23 January last, this Government agreed to a proposal that will allow pensioners affected by the 2012 changes in rate bands to have their pension entitlement calculated on a Total Contributions basis, including provision for up to 20 years of a new home caring credit.

Legislation has to be drafted and enacted to enable implementation of these arrangements, and a number of options regarding the best approach to passing that legislation are being considered. In addition, an information technology system has to be developed in line with the legislation. My Department is currently working on both of these. As I've said previously, it is still planned to commence the reviews before the end of this year, with the first payments being made in the first quarter of 2019. In this regard, the commitment we made in January for the payments to be dated from 26 March last still stands.

It is not necessary for people to contact the Department on this matter. Once the legislation is enacted and the systems and processes are ready, my Department will write to the people impacted and provide them with the opportunity to have their pension calculation reviewed.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

1216. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a disability allowance application by a person (details supplied) will be examined; if this claim can be backdated; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35694/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The person concerned submitted an application for disability allowance (DA) on 25 November 2015. Their application, based upon all the evidence submitted, was refused on medical grounds as it was not found that this gentleman was substantially restricted in taking up employment.

The person concerned was notified in writing of this decision on 18 February 2016 and was also notified of their right to request a review of this decision or to appeal it to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO). No request for an appeal or review was received.

On 18 July 2017 this gentleman submitted another application for DA and was awarded from 19 July 2017. He received his first payment on 11 October 2017.

The person concerned was refused a request for backdating on 25 April 2018 as he did not supply sufficient grounds to warrant backdating.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the deputy.

Treatment Benefit Scheme Eligibility

1217. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person on a carer's allowance is granted stamps towards PRSI employee benefits such as teeth cleaning and eye tests. [35708/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Qualification for Treatment Benefit is based on satisfying certain PRSI conditions. The person concerned would need to have paid 260 PRSI contributions at either Class A, E, H, P or S, since first starting work, and also have 39 contributions paid or credited at these classes, in the relevant tax year on which the claim is based. In 2018, this is the 2016 tax year.

If the person concerned is in receipt of Carers Allowance, they may be entitled to credited contributions which, if they also have a minimum of 260 contributions paid, could qualify them for Treatment Benefit.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Pension Provisions

1218. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person on a carer's allowance is granted credits towards their pension. [35709/18]

1233. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if all persons on disability allowance are entitled to apply for and receive PRSI credits reckonable for the State pension irrespective of whether they were previously employed as a PAYE worker or worked as a self-employed person paying class S stamp; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36067/18]

1269. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the policy of not providing credited PRSI contributions for persons in receipt of carer's allowance will be reviewed; and if this policy will be changed in recognition of the fact that carers are working full-time looking after their family member and should be recognised as such. [36329/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1218, 1233 and 1269 together.

Credited contributions (credits) are social insurance contributions designed to protect the social insurance entitlement record of insured workers who are not in a position to make PRSI contributions.

Credits are awarded in circumstances such as unemployment or illness, and their purpose is to help protect the social insurance entitlements of insured persons during periods when they may not be in a position to pay contributions.

In order to qualify for credits, a person must first have entered insurable employment - he or she must have paid at least one PRSI contribution at Class A, B, C, D, E, H or P.

In general credits can only be awarded where an individual has had a recent attachment to the workforce i.e. within the last 2 years. Self-employed class S contributions are not reckonable toward the award of credits.

Persons in receipt of disability allowance or carers allowance can qualify for credits where they have previously entered insurable employment and paid at least one PRSI contribution at Class A, B, C, D, E, H or P and where they have had a recent attachment to the workforce.

In combination with paid PRSI contributions, credits can assist employees in qualifying for short-term schemes such as jobseeker's benefit and enhance the level of benefit for long-term schemes such as the level of payment of State pension contributory (SPC). Credits do not however, in isolation, entitle individuals to qualify for social insurance benefits.

Individuals who are caring and who do not qualify for carers allowance may qualify for the homemaker's scheme. The homemaker's scheme is designed to help homemakers and carers qualify for the SPC, and applies to homemaking periods since 6 April 1994. It equally applies to both men and women.

The scheme provides that years spent working in the home while caring on a full-time basis for a child up to 12 years of age or an incapacitated person age 12 or over will be disregarded in calculating a person's yearly average number of contributions for the purposes of determining the rate of their entitlement to SPC. In this way the homemaker's scheme ensures that an individual's entitlement to SPC is protected during periods spent caring.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

1219. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a carer's allowance appeal by a person (details supplied). [35710/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer, having fully considered all of the available evidence, including that adduced at the oral hearing, has decided to allow the appeal of the person concerned. The person concerned has been notified of the Appeals

Officer's decision.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Allowance Payments

1220. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the decision to cease jobseeker's allowance to a person (details supplied) will be reviewed; if this payment will be reinstated with arrears; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35786/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): JobPath is an approach to employment activation which caters mainly for people who are long-term unemployed (over 12 months) to assist them to secure and sustain full-time paid employment or self-employment.

The person concerned is currently in receipt of a Jobseekers Allowance payment of €107.70 p.w. and she has been selected for participation on JobPath. In North Kildare the JobPath Program is delivered by the CENIT Group in partnership with Seetec.

The person concerned was referred to the program on the 2nd of December 2017. Regrettably, she has failed, without good cause, to attend 7 appointments with her JobPath provider (Cenit), which has resulted in the application of sanctions on four occasions.

The sanctions imposed have led to a penalty rate reduction of €25.00 per week on 3 occasions (7 weeks in total) and a further full payment suspension on 1 occasion (for 4 weeks in total).

Decisions in relation to the imposition of sanctions on Jobseekers Allowance payments are undertaken in accordance with Section 141A of the Social Welfare (Consolidation) Act, 2005 as amended.

The payment of arrears is not under consideration at this time.

An Appeals form was however sent to the person concerned on 22nd August 2018 and she has a period of 21 days to complete this form and to return it to her Intreo Centre. Subsequent to the finalisation of the appeals process the Deciding Officer will implement the decision of the Appeals Officer, and if any arrears are due, they will be issued to the person concerned at that time.

I hope this clarifies the position.

Social Welfare Schemes Data

1221. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons in counties Cavan and Monaghan that were in receipt of the carer's allowance, carer's benefit and the respite grant between 2011 and 2016, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35798/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The information requested (where available) by the Deputy is detailed in the attached tabular statement.

I note that this information is published in Open Data format in my Department's Annual Statistics Report, available at <https://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Annual-SWS-Statistical-Information-Report.aspx>. County breakdowns for all Social Welfare benefits are available from 2005 on an annual basis, and from 2016 on a monthly basis.

I also note that Respite Care Grant was renamed as Carers Support Grant in 2016 to better reflect how the Grant is used, and that data for this payment are only available from 2013.

Recipients of carer's allowance, carer's benefit and respite care grant in each of the years 2011 to 2016

Scheme	Year	Cavan	Monaghan
Carer's Allowance	2016	1,200	960
Carer's Allowance	2015	1,030	853
Carer's Allowance	2014	947	822
Carer's Allowance	2013	904	814
Carer's Allowance	2012	825	743
Carer's Allowance	2011	826	735
Carer's Benefit	2016	68	39
Carer's Benefit	2015	N/a	N/a
Carer's Benefit	2014	39	28
Carer's Benefit	2013	30	17
Carer's Benefit	2012	17	16
Carer's Benefit	2011	26	25
Respite Care Grant	2016	1,455	1,156
Respite Care Grant	2015	1,253	1,027
Respite Care Grant	2014	1,136	975
Respite Care Grant	2013	1,087	957
Respite Care Grant	2012	N/a	N/a
Respite Care Grant	2011	N/a	N/a

Social Insurance Fund

1222. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the revision of PRSI being levied on phantom gains deemed to be arising to a trade when in fact there is an overall loss will be revised further to correspondence from persons (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35805/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Deputy is referring to a change in the Finance Act 2013 which provided that the release/forgiveness of a debt relating to land, which is held as trading stock is regarded as (notional) income for tax purposes. The debt forgiveness is regarded as "reckonable income" for PRSI purposes and is liable to PRSI at the Class S rate of 4%.

This provision only applies to individuals:

- who own land as part of their trade,

- the value of that land was previously written down, in many cases giving rise to large trading losses, and,

- who benefitted from debt forgiveness on borrowings made to purchase that land.

Given the complexity of this issue, in particular to ensuring the correct application of the PRSI charge, my officials are currently re-examining this issue and the Department will be in contact with the relevant bodies including those who have contacted the Deputy on finalisation of its deliberations.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Eligibility

1223. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason the domiciliary care allowance is only paid up until a child's 16th birthday rather than 18 as is the children's allowance; and if raising the age limit to 18 years of age has been considered. [35811/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA) ceases to be payable when a child reaches age 16 years. Disability Allowance (DA) can then be paid from age 16 if the qualifying conditions for that scheme are met.

Following a commitment made in the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for people with disabilities 2015 -2024, the "Make Work Pay for People with Disabilities" (MWP) report was published in April 2017. The report undertook to better identify how people with disabilities could be supported to achieve their employment ambitions. A number of MWP report recommendations focussed on the need to support young adults through education, training and social inclusion according to their capacity, and to change the qualifying age for disability allowance from 16 to 18 years of age while leaving Domiciliary Care allowance in payment where applicable to 18 years of age.

An extensive national consultation process was organised to engage people with disabilities, parents of children with disabilities, and sectoral representatives to seek their views on the specific recommendations in the report and this has recently concluded.

A report on this consultation process is being prepared and will be taken into account by Government before any decision is made on the recommendations.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Benefit Applications

1224. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an application for carer's benefit by a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35871/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's benefit (CARB) is a PRSI based payment, made to persons who are providing full-time care and attention to a person who has such a disability that they require that level of care.

An application for CARB was received from the person concerned on 7 June 2018. The application is currently being processed and once completed, the person concerned will be noti-

fied directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Employment Schemes Eligibility

1225. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to extend the period of time that participants over 50 years of age can remain on community employment and Tús schemes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35873/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The aim of the Community Employment (CE) programme is to enhance the employability of disadvantaged and unemployed people by providing work experience and training opportunities for them within their communities. The programme helps break the cycle of unemployment and improve a person's chances of returning to the labour market. Participation on CE is intended to be for a temporary fixed term. These placements are not full-time sustainable jobs. There are participation limits in place to ensure that as many unemployed people as possible are able to benefit from the scheme.

A number of new conditions were introduced on CE in July 2017 to further support progression and broaden access to CE to a wider range of people. In general all CE placements for new entrants aged between 21 and 55 years will be for 1 year - however CE participants, working towards a major award, can seek to extend participation by up to two years to enable them to reach the required standard of qualification. In addition, those over 55 years of age can remain on CE for three years.

An overall lifetime limit of 6 years will apply to all CE participants. A person may re-qualify for CE after 12 months of being in receipt of a qualifying payment, provided they have not reached their 6 year limit. Persons in receipt of a qualifying disability-linked social welfare payment will be eligible for an overall lifetime limit of 7 years.

Participants over age 62 are allowed to participate on a continuous basis up to the State Pension age, subject to satisfactory performance on the scheme and to annual approval by the Department. The places allocated for these participants within each individual CE scheme are subject to a limitation criteria.

On the other hand, Tús is a community work placement initiative which aims to provide short-term work opportunities for those who are unemployed for more than a year. The duration of the Tús contract, which is a maximum of 12 months, was set to reflect a number of inter-related elements which ensures the following:

- (a) that the number of placements available are open to those on the live register,
- (b) that weaknesses identified in other work programmes resulting from longer duration placements are not replicated in Tús, and
- (c) to ensure that Tús fits in with the objectives set out in the Government's activation policies in Pathways to Work.

This approach ensures that as many people as possible who are unemployed for over 12 months are able to benefit from the initiative. The existing 12 months duration on the scheme is deemed to be adequate to meet the programme's objectives.

There are currently no plans to extend the duration of placement beyond twelve months for any Tús participant, regardless of their age.

Pension Provisions

1226. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when the European Code of Social Security became binding here; her views on whether the 2012 pension eligibility changes comply with the code in all respects; her further views on the fact that some persons, in view of their age, were not given sufficient notice of the change as set out in the code; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35874/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Ireland ratified the European Code of Social Security (Code), Article 74, on 16 February 1971 and has accepted the parts of the Code relating to sickness benefit, unemployment benefit, old-age benefit, family benefit and survivors' benefit. It is a matter for the European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR) to examine conformity with the Code and Ireland is not currently in receipt of resolutions from the ECSR, on the application of the Code, relating to Part V, old age benefit.

The eligibility changes to the State Pension Contributory which came into force from 2012 were indicated a significant number of years in advance.

The 1993 report "Developing the National Pensions System – Final Report of the National Pensions Board", recommended that the number of paid contributions required to qualify for a contributory pension should be increased to 520 (i.e. 10 years). The legislation to effect these recommendations was contained in Section 12 of the Social Welfare Act 1997 which provided for their implementation in two stages, with the paid contribution requirement being standardised at 260 from 2002, rising to 520 from April 2012.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals

1227. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a review into the pension entitlements of a person (details supplied) will be carried out; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35884/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that the appeal from the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer who has decided to convene an oral hearing in this case.

Every effort will be made to hear the case as quickly as possible and the person concerned will be informed when arrangements for the oral hearing have been made.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 1228 answered with Question No. 1198.

Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance Scheme Eligibility

1229. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to expand the maximum wage limit to qualify for the back to school clothing and footwear allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35960/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The back to school clothing and footwear allowance (BSCFA) scheme provides a once-off payment to eligible families to assist with the costs of clothing and footwear when children start or return to school each autumn. The Government has provided €49.5 million for the scheme in 2018.

In general, the allowance is payable in respect of eligible children between the ages of 4 and 17 in respect of whom a qualified child allowance is being paid and eligible children between the ages of 18 and 22 who are in full-time second level education and in respect of whom a qualified child allowance is being paid. To qualify for BSCFA a person must meet a number of conditions namely:

- The child must meet the age criteria,
- The applicant must be in receipt of a qualifying payment and getting an increase in that payment for the qualified child (except in certain circumstances),
- The assessable income for the household must be within prescribed limits,
- The applicant and the child (or children) in respect of whom the allowance is claimed must be resident in the State.

The household income limits for the scheme were increased for 2018 to ensure that the increases in social welfare payment rates introduced by Budget 2018 do not negatively impact on people's entitlement to the allowance. The household income limits are set out in the tabular statement.

Any changes to the scheme, including a change to the household income limits would have to be considered in a budgetary context and within the scope of the overall resources available for welfare improvements.

Further information on the scheme is available on the Department's website: www.welfare.ie/backtoschool

I trust this clarifies the position.

Tabular Statement

Weekly household income limits for 2018

Number of children	Couple	Single Parent
1 child	€587.20	€425.10
2 children	€619.00	€456.90
3 children	€650.80	€488.70
4 children *	€682.60	€520.50

* Limit is increased by €31.80 for each additional child

Invalidity Pension Appeals

1230. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an invalidity pension appeal by a person (details supplied); the average waiting time on an appeal for this payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35993/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 5th April 2018. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. These papers were received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 17th August 2018 and the case will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The average processing time for invalidity pension appeals for the period January to the end of July 2018 was 25.3 weeks for appeals requiring an oral hearing, and 23.6 weeks for appeals which were determined by means of a summary decision.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension

1231. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if persons on invalidity pension are permitted to hold non-executive directorships of a family business which require them to attend a small number of meetings; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36046/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Invalidity Pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social contribution (PRSI) conditions.

A person in receipt of IP cannot engage in work. However, with prior written permission from the Department, a person may undertake light work for which no remuneration is or would ordinarily be payable.

Should a person in receipt of IP wish to take up or resume open labour market employment, they may qualify for Partial Capacity Benefit, a social welfare scheme which allows a person to return to work or self-employment (if they have reduced capacity to work) and continue to receive a payment from the Department.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Child Benefit Eligibility

1232. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a matter in relation to a person (details supplied) will be reviewed; her plans to reintroduce a measure for persons in this situation; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

[36055/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Child Benefit is a monthly payment made to families with children in respect of all qualified children up to the age of 16 years. The payment continues to be paid in respect of children up to their 18th birthday who are in full-time education, or who have a disability. Child Benefit is currently paid to almost 629,000 families in respect of almost 1.2 million children, with an estimated expenditure of more than €2 billion in 2018.

Given the universality of Child Benefit, extending entitlement to parents of full time students in second level education who are over 18 years of age would not be a targeted approach. The adoption of such a proposal would have significant cost implications and would have to be considered in an overall budgetary context.

Families on low incomes can avail of a number of social welfare schemes that support children in full-time education until the age of 22, including:

- Increase for a Qualified Child (IQCs) with primary social welfare payments;
- the Working Family Payment (formerly Family Income Supplement) for low-paid employees with children;
- the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance for low income families (paid at the full-time second-level education rate).

These schemes provide targeted assistance that is directly linked to household income and thereby support low-income families with older children participating in full-time education.

Any changes to extend eligibility for Child Benefit would have to be considered in the overall budgetary process.

Question No. 1233 answered with Question No. 1218.

Partial Capacity Benefit Scheme Applications

1234. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision on a partial capacity benefit application by a person (details supplied) will issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36075/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Partial Capacity Benefit (PCB) is a social welfare scheme which allows a person who has been in receipt of Illness Benefit for six months and who may not have full capacity for work, to return to employment and continue to receive a partial or full payment from my Department. An Illness Benefit customer who applies for PCB will, in the first instance, be assessed by a Medical Assessor who will review the restriction, if any, on their capacity for work. A person assessed with a moderate level of work incapacity will receive 50% of their current payment, a person assessed with a severe level will receive 75% of their payment and a person assessed with a profound level will get full payment.

The person concerned currently has a claim for Illness Benefit and has made an application for Partial Capacity Benefit (PCB). This application was received on 9 July 2018 and has been referred to a Medical Assessor for an opinion on the level of work restriction. The person concerned has now had their application assessed and a letter has issued to her with the result.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Payments

1235. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when payment will issue in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36102/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's Allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment, made to persons who are providing full-time care and attention to a person who has such a disability that they require that level of care.

The application for CA from the person concerned was disallowed by a Deciding Officer as her means were determined to exceed the statutory limit.

The person concerned was notified on 22 July 2017 of this decision the reason for it and her right of review and appeal.

On 2 August 2018, the Department received notice from the Social Welfare Appeals Office that they had revised the decision of the Deciding Officer in this case and partially allowed the person's appeal. Consequently CA was awarded to the person concerned on 27 August 2018, with effect from 19 October 2017. The first payment will issue to her nominated post office on 6 September 2018.

The person concerned was awarded carer's allowance from 19 October 2017 at the rate of €23.80 per week. Due to a budgetary increase her rate increased to €30.80 with effect from 29 March 2018 to date. She is now assessed with weekly means of €221.35.

Arrears for the period 19 October 2017 to 5 September 2018 to the value of €1,281.20 will issue shortly. A separate payment for the 2018 carer's support grant for the value of €1,700.00 will also issue shortly to the nominated post office of the person concerned.

The person concerned was notified on 27 August 2018 of the revised decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Pension Provisions

1236. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 2459 of 24 July 2018, if her Department will interact directly with the UK authorities as in the past in view of the existence of bilateral arrangements and the difficulty experienced by private persons attempting to deal with the UK authorities such as in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36127/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Under the social security arrangements between Ireland and the UK, the respective authorities exchange social insurance record details, as required, for pension entitlement assessment purposes. The person concerned is in receipt of pension from both jurisdictions. My department is not aware of any further information that is outstanding at this time.

As UK pension entitlement has already been established, any subsequent query that the person wishes to raise regarding their UK pension should be directed to the Department of Work and Pensions in the UK.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Exceptional Needs Payment Applications

1237. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason a basic social welfare payment has not been granted in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36128/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned applied for Jobseekers Allowance and Supplementary Welfare Allowance both of which were disallowed because the applicant did not provide all the documentation required to make a determination on eligibility for payment. A Community Welfare Officer visited the applicant to advise her that if she was dissatisfied with the decisions, she should appeal them and she was given the relevant appeal forms to enable her to do so.

On the 28th August 2018 the applicant sought an independent review of the decision to refuse an application for an Exceptional Needs Payment made on 13th March 2018. The Reviewing Officer was satisfied that the original decision was correct based on the information to hand at the time. Her current circumstances were reviewed and the local Community Welfare Officer determined that an Exceptional Needs Payment was warranted and a payment was made on 31st August 2018.

The situation will be kept under review pending appeal.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Rent Supplement Scheme Applications

1238. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason rent support is not being paid in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36130/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The purpose of Rent Supplement is to assist with reasonable accommodation costs of eligible persons living in private rented accommodation, where they are unable to provide for their accommodation costs from their own resources and do not have accommodation available to them from any other source.

The person concerned was in receipt of rent supplement since 10/01/2017 at the monthly rate of €682.31 with a total of €10,311.50 paid to date. On 26/06/2018, written notification of a claim review was issued to the person concerned. The person concerned was advised that her claim was suspended and may be closed if she failed to return the requested documents within 14 days of the date of the letter. On 25/07/2018, the claim was closed as the person concerned failed to make contact with the rents unit or to supply any of the requested documents in support of her claim. Written notification of the claim closure issued to the person concerned together with a new application pack should the person concerned wish to make another claim.

The person concerned should fully complete the SWARS1 and return with the required sup-

porting documentation. If the person concerned wishes to pursue an application for Rent Supplement and has further queries, she can contact the South Kildare West Wicklow Rents Unit at telephone No. 01-6732155, by post at Rents Unit, PO Box 1107, Newbridge, Co. Kildare or by email at RentsSouthKildare@wefare.ie.

Due to the imminent threat of homelessness, the person concerned can contact Kildare County Council to have her long term housing needs assessed as a matter of urgency.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Employment Schemes Supervisors

1239. **Deputy Seán Barrett** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if community employment supervisors are entitled to pension benefits upon retirement as was recommended at the LRC ten years ago (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36154/18]

1251. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the steps that have been taken to provide community employment supervisors and assistant supervisors with pensions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36255/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1239 and 1251 together.

Community Employment (CE) scheme supervisors are employees of private companies in the community and voluntary sector that receive public funding. They are not employees of my Department nor are they public servants, and as such they were not subject to pay reductions under the provisions of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (FEMPI) which only applied to public servants.

The supervisor pension scheme issue is currently being examined by a Community Sector High Level Forum, chaired by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

A detailed scoping exercise was carried out with input from the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) on the potential costs of providing Exchequer support for the establishment of such a pension scheme for employees across the Community and Voluntary sector in Ireland. The exercise clearly illustrated that this matter presents very significant issues for the Exchequer, with a potential cost to the State of €188 million per annum in respect of funding to enable an employer pension contribution in State funded

Community and Voluntary organisations, excluding any provision for immediate ex-gratia lump sum payment of pension as sought, which could, depending on the size of the sector, entail a further Exchequer cost of up to €318 million.

I am very conscious that while the issue relates to Community Employment supervisors and assistant supervisors, such individuals comprise of just one group within the wider Community and Voluntary sector. However, the Deputy should note that any provision of State funding for such a scheme in respect of those employees could potentially give rise to claims for similar schemes on the part of those in the broader sector, thus crystallising the potential level of liability. Any solution to this issue will require careful consideration, in particular the implications for scarce Exchequer resources.

Carer's Allowance Applications

1240. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a carer's allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36161/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I confirm that my department received an application for carer's allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 3 July 2018.

The application was awarded to the person concerned on 27 August 2018 with effect from 5 July 2018 and the first payment will issue to her nominated post office on 13 September 2018.

Arrears of allowance due from 5 July 2018 to 12 September 2018 will issue shortly.

The person concerned was notified on 27 August 2018 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

1241. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a carer's allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36162/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My department received an application for carer's allowance (CA) from the person concerned in relation to her brother on 21 June 2016.

It is a condition for receipt of a CA that the person being cared for must have such disability that they require full-time care and attention, that full time care and attention is provided and that the means of the person concerned must be less than the statutory limit.

The evidence submitted in support of this application was examined and the deciding officer decided to disallow the application for CA on three grounds: that the evidence did not indicate that the requirement for full-time care was satisfied, that although the person concerned was providing a certain amount of care, the level provided was not considered to be full-time and thirdly, that the means of the person concerned were not less than the statutory limit.

The person concerned was notified on 18 January 2017 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

The person concerned subsequently requested two reviews in relation to this decision. The outcome of the reviews was that although it was found that the care recipient required full-time care and attention, the two other qualifying conditions were still not satisfied.

On 24 April 2017 and 18 May 2017 the person concerned was notified of these review outcomes and of her right of appeal.

The person concerned appealed this decision to the Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO) on 13 June 2017. A submission in support of the decision was prepared and forwarded to the SWAO on 4 August 2017 for determination.

The appeal was disallowed by the SWAO on 3 April 2018.

Subsequently the matter was recalled on 22 May 2018 by the SWAO for further investigation.

On 8 August 2018, the Department received notice from the SWAO that they had revised their initial decision and allowed the appeal. Consequently CA was awarded to the person concerned on 27 August 2018, with effect from 22 September 2016. The first payment will issue to her nominated bank account on 6 September 2018.

Arrears for the period 22 September 2016 to 5 September 2018 including the 2017 and 2018 carer's support grants will issue shortly.

The person concerned was notified on 27 August 2018 of the revised decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

1242. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a carer's allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36163/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's allowance is a means-tested social assistance payment, made to persons who are providing full-time care and attention to a person who has such a disability that they require that level of care.

A person can be considered to be providing full-time care and attention where they are engaged in employment, self-employment or on training courses outside the home for a maximum of 15 hours per week, provided that they can show to the satisfaction of a deciding officer that adequate care has been provided for the care recipient in their absence.

I confirm that my department received an application for carer's allowance from the person concerned on 1 June 2018.

The applicant was employed in excess of 15 hours per week and ceased employment on 30 July 2018.

The application was awarded to the person concerned on 15 August 2018 with effect from 2 August 2018 and the first payment issued to his nominated bank account on 23 August 2018.

Arrears of allowance due from 2 August 2018 to 22 August 2018 also issued on 23 August 2018.

The person concerned was notified on 15 August 2018 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

1243. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a carer's allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36164/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I confirm that the department received an application for Carer's Allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 12 April 2018.

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

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

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

The person concerned was notified on 23 July 2018 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

The person concerned requested a review of this decision and submitted additional evidence in support of his application.

This additional information is currently under consideration.

Once the review is complete, the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

1244. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a carer's allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36165/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a person who has such a disability that they require that level of care.

An application for CA was received from the person concerned on 7 June 2018.

This application was awarded to the person concerned on 27 August 2018 and the first payment will issue to her nominated bank account on 13 September 2018.

Arrears of allowance due from to 7 June 2018 to 12 September 2018 will also issue.

The person concerned was notified of these details on 27 August 2018.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Farm Assist Scheme Appeals

1245. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an appeal for farm assist by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36167/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): To date, my Department has not received an appeal from the claimant in this case.

Farm Assist is a means-tested payment and, as such, any capital held is assessed as means. Should an appeal be lodged, my Department will look at any matters raised that the claimant considers should be taken into consideration.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

1246. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for a carer's allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36168/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I confirm that my department received an application for carer's allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 16 March 2018.

The application was awarded to the person concerned on 18 July 2018 with effect from 22 March 2018. The first payment issued to her nominated bank account on 9 August 2018.

Arrears of allowance due from 22 March 2018 to 8 August 2018 have also issued to her on 16 August 2018.

The person concerned was notified on 18 July 2018 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

1247. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for carer's allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36169/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I confirm that my department received an application for carer's allowance from the person concerned on 23 April 2018. Additional information in relation to the person's application was requested by a deciding officer on 23 July 2018 and 21 August 2018.

Once the information is received the application will be processed without delay and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Employment Schemes Eligibility

1248. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if there are circumstances in which a community employment placement may be extended beyond three years such as in the case of a person (details supplied). [36193/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned has completed 3 years on a Community Employment Scheme (CE) which is the maximum amount for a mainstream participant, as per the government strategy of July 2017. The participant has asked for their case to be re-examined for an extension to cover a fourth year on C.E. Merchants Quay project.

Under the Programme Framework for CE Drug Rehabilitation Schemes, three years is the maximum allowed for Support Workers. However, I will ask my officials to review this case having regard to the circumstances outlined.

I hope this clarifies the position for you.

Redundancy Payments

1249. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for State redundancy by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36207/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): It is the responsibility of the employer to pay statutory redundancy and other wage related payments to all its eligible employees in the first instance. In the event that the employer cannot pay due to financial circumstances or if the company has gone into liquidation, my Department can step in to pay the statutory amounts from the Social Insurance Fund. In cases of liquidation, the liquidator takes the place of the employer and is the relevant officer under legislation to submit the claims on behalf of the employees.

A liquidator was appointed over Arravasc Limited on 18th May 2018. The liquidator submitted Redundancy and Insolvency claims to my Department in respect of eligible employees, including the person concerned, in mid-July 2018.

My officials have confirmed that a significant number of claims have already been authorised and payment has issued. All outstanding claims are currently being processed and it is expected that these claims will be authorised and paid in the coming weeks, subject to all conditions being satisfied.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pensions

1250. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of plans to alter the State pension qualification criteria to ensure that all persons who have had periods outside of the PAYE system or have been homemakers for a period are entitled to a full State pension. [36252/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): As a general policy, the Government intends to introduce a Total Contributions Approach (TCA)

to establishing level of entitlement for all new state pension contributory claims from 2020 onwards. I launched a public consultation on this proposal earlier this year in May. This closed last Monday, the 3rd of September. My Department has now started studying the submissions. Following examination and consideration of the submissions to the consultation, my officials will prepare proposals for the design of the new approach for consideration by the Government in due course.

Separately, I announced on 23rd January an interim TCA for those affected by the 2012 rate-band changes. Under this approach, a person who reached pension age after 1 September 2012 (i.e., who is among those affected by the new ratebands introduced from that date) and who has a 40 year record of paid and credited social insurance contributions, subject to a maximum of 20 years of credits, will qualify for a maximum contributory pension where they satisfy the other qualifying conditions for the scheme.

Up to 20 years of HomeCaring credits, and/or 10 years of other qualifying credits (e.g., when unemployed or ill) may be used, subject to the total number of credits not exceeding 20 years. This approach is expected to significantly benefit many people, particularly women, whose work history includes an extended period of time outside the paid workplace, while raising families or in a caring role. It will make it easier for pensioners assessed under the yearly average model, to qualify for a higher rate of the State Pension (contributory). This interim TCA will ensure that the totality of a person's social insurance contributions - as opposed to the timing of them - determines a final pension outcome.

Legislation has to be drafted and enacted to enable implementation of these arrangements, and a number of options regarding the best approach to passing that legislation are being considered. In addition, an information technology system has to be developed in line with the legislation. My Department is currently working on both of these. As I've said previously, it is still planned to commence the reviews before the end of this year, with the first payments being made in the first quarter of 2019. In this regard, the commitment we made in January for the payments to be backdated to the end of last March still stands.

It is not necessary for people to contact the Department on this matter. Once the legislation is enacted and the systems and processes are ready, my Department will write to the people impacted and provide them with the opportunity to have their pension calculation reviewed.

I hope this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

Question No. 1251 answered with Question No. 1239.

Illness Benefit Data

1252. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the date on which it was decided to change the application forms for illness benefit; the consultations that took place; the persons or bodies with which consultation took place; the dates on which consultations took place; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36257/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department recently introduced a new claim form (called "IB1") and a new medical certificate (called "MED1") to replace the previous MC1 and MC2 forms for certification of the Department's Illness and Injury Benefit schemes. This change is part of a programme of modernisation in the Department's Illness Benefit section which took effect from Monday 6 August. The Department's intention in implementing this modernisation programme - including the changes to forms - is to improve the certification processes and to make claim and payment procedures

more efficient for everyone involved – GPs, patients and the Department. The introduction of the new forms was discussed with the Irish Medical Organisation in advance.

The majority of certificates and claim forms being received each day by the Department are the new scannable versions and these claims are being processed without any delays.

Some GPs have continued to use the old forms after this changeover date. In order to facilitate the continued payment of Illness and Injury Benefit to our customers, my Department has, to date, continued to accept old MC1 and MC2 forms where provided by GPs. While the continued use of old forms is causing delays to our processing times, my Department is doing everything possible to ensure that customers are paid as quickly as possible.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Payments Waiting Times

1253. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the waiting times for all social welfare payments. [36258/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The information requested (where available) by the Deputy is detailed in the tabular statement.

Social Welfare claims by average waiting times 31 July 2018

Scheme	Average Waiting Time - (weeks)
Jobseeker's Benefit	1
Jobseeker's Allowance	2
One-Parent Family Payment	4
State Pension Contributory (Domestic claims)	7
Widow's, Widower's or Surviving Civil Partner's Contributory Pension	2
Widowed Parent Grant	1
State Pension Non-Contributory	10
Household Benefits	1
Free Travel	2
Domiciliary Care Allowance	10
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	1
Child Benefit (Domestic)	3
Maternity Benefit	6
Paternity Benefit	6
Working Family Payment	3
Carer's Allowance	18
Carer's Benefit	12
Disability Allowance	11
Invalidity Pension	7
Illness Benefit	1

Question No. 1254 answered with Question No. 1198.

Social Welfare Benefits Reviews

1255. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to establish a cross-departmental and cross-party working group to examine child maintenance and issues in regard to these payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36260/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): As the Deputy is aware, my Department is reviewing the maintenance and liable relative procedures, insofar as they relate to the one-parent family payment scheme.

This review is nearing completion, and my officials will shortly be liaising with the Department of Justice and Equality, which is the Department responsible for Family Law Acts, with a view to jointly considering the next steps in relation to family maintenance arrangements.

Illness Benefit Eligibility

1256. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if consideration has been given to the introduction of illness benefit for self-employed persons, that is, if the class S contributions being paid by the self-employed could become reckonable for illness benefit purposes. [36265/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Self-employed workers who earn €5,000 or more in a contribution year, are liable for PRSI at the class S rate of 4%, subject to a minimum annual payment of €500. This provides them with access to the following benefits: State pension (contributory), widow's, widower's or surviving civil partner's pension (contributory), guardian's payment (contributory), maternity benefit, adoptive benefit, paternity benefit, treatment benefit (from March 2017). Entitlement to invalidity pension was extended to the self-employed from December 2017.

This compares favourably with employees who, in general, are liable to the PRSI Class A rate of 4%. In addition, their employers are liable to PRSI at the rate of 8.6% on weekly earnings up to and including €376 or at the rate of 10.85% where weekly earnings exceed €376. Accordingly the combined rate of PRSI rate paid in respect of Class A employees is 12.6% or 14.85%, depending on the level of weekly earnings. These Class A employees are entitled to the full range of social insurance benefits.

The issue of extending additional social insurance benefits to the self-employed paying Class S PRSI was considered in the Actuarial Review of the Social Insurance fund as at 31 December, 2015, which I published in October 2017. The review, required by legislation, was carried out by independent consultants, KPMG. It examines the projected income and expenditure of the SIF over the course of the 55 year period from 2016 to 2071.

The review found that the fund currently has a modest surplus of income over expenditure. In 2016 there was a surplus of €0.4 billion on expenditure of €8.8 billion and receipts of €9.2 billion. However, this will reduce over the next two years and will return to a small shortfall

in 2020. The annual shortfalls are projected to increase from 2021 onwards as the ageing of the population impacts. Projections indicate that, in the absence of further action to tackle the shortfall, the excess of expenditure over income of the fund will increase significantly over the medium to long term. The shortfall in expenditure over income is projected to increase from €0.2 billion in 2020 to €3.3 billion by 2030 and to €22.2 billion by 2071. It should be noted that as self-employed workers were to be eligible to apply for invalidity pension from December 2017, the cost of this introduction has been factored into the actuarial review's findings.

As part of the review the independent consultants were required to project the additional PRSI expenditure if invalidity pension and illness, jobseeker's and carer's benefits were extended to Class S self-employed workers and the PRSI contribution rates required to provide these benefits on a revenue neutral basis.

The review found that the combined cost of introducing the invalidity, illness, jobseeker's and carer's benefits for PRSI Class S contributions is estimated to be €118 million in 2018, rising steadily to €223 million in 2020. By 2025 the projected cost is €413 million and, over the period of the review the cost would rise to €1.3 billion in 2071.

The review indicates that, where these benefits are extended to the self-employed, the Class S rate of PRSI contribution would need to increase substantially in order to ensure that the benefits are delivered in a revenue neutral manner. It estimates that when expenditure on the additional benefits is considered over the entire projection period, PRSI rates would need to increase by 94% under a scenario of no subvention from the exchequer. This is equivalent to an increase of the Class S contribution rate from the current 4% rate to 7.8%.

This increased contribution is attributable to the costs of extending these additional benefits to PRSI Class S contributors. It does not take account of the value to PRSI Class S contributors of access to the range of existing benefits, and in particular State pension contributory. The consultants estimated that the typical cost of State pension (contributory) on its own is of the order of 10% to 15%, depending on other factors including rate of average earnings and date of commencing paying PRSI. Adding in the other benefits referenced the total Class S rate of contribution to ensure revenue neutrality would be of the order of 20% per annum.

The Actuarial Review provides government with a timely and evidence-led opportunity to undertake a full review of our social insurance system and to consult with stakeholders. The review will take account of the financial sustainability of the Fund given the expected demographic challenges and consideration of extending the scope of benefits for workers generally, including the self-employed.

Jobseeker's Allowance Appeals

1257. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the appeals process regarding a jobseeker's allowance application by a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36266/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer, having fully considered all of the available evidence, has decided to disallow the appeal of the person concerned by way of a summary decision. The person concerned has been notified of the Appeals Officer's decision.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals

against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

1258. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied) for a disability allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36270/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I confirm that an application from this lady for disability allowance (DA) was received by the Department on 19 July 2018.

The processing time for individual DA claims may vary in accordance with their relative complexity in terms of the three main qualifying criteria, the person's circumstances and the information they provide in support of their claim.

The application has been referred to a Social Welfare Inspector (SWI) for a report on the person's means and circumstances. Once the SWI has submitted his/her report to DA section, a decision will be made on the application and this lady will be notified directly of the outcome.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Applications

1259. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied) for an invalidity pension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36273/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The lady referred to has been awarded invalidity pension with effect from the 10 May 2018. Payment will issue to her nominated bank account on the 13 September 2018. Any arrears due from 10 May 2018 to 12 September 2018 (less any overlapping social welfare payment) will issue in due course. The lady in question was notified of this decision on the 30 August 2018.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Appeals

1260. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a social welfare appeal by a person (details supplied) in regard to their claim for a disability allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36274/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 10th May 2018. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. These papers were received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 15th May 2018 and the case will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on

documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Appeals

1261. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a social welfare appeal by a person (details supplied) in regard to their application for a domiciliary care allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36275/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 11th July 2018. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. When these papers have been received from the Department, the case in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral appeal hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Appeals

1262. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a social welfare appeal by a person (details supplied) for an invalidity pension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36276/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Invalidity Pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

The Department received a claim for IP for the gentleman referred to on 22 December 2017. He was refused IP on the grounds that the medical conditions for the scheme were not satisfied. He was notified on the 8 March 2018 of this decision, the reasons for it and of his right of review and appeal.

The gentleman concerned subsequently appealed the decision and submitted further medical evidence in support of his appeal. Following a review of all the evidence available to the department, a submission is being prepared and will be forwarded to the Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO) for determination as soon as possible.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Appeals

1263. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied) for a disability allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36277/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The person concerned has been awarded disability allowance with effect from 13 June 2018. The first payment was made by her chosen payment method on 22 August 2018.

Arrears of payment due will issue as soon as possible once any necessary adjustment is calculated and applied in respect of any overlapping payments (if applicable).

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Tax Reliefs Eligibility

1264. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person will still qualify for tax relief on the contributions they have invested through the auto-enrolment scheme under the strawman proposal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36289/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Government recently published a ‘Strawman’ proposal for an Automatic Enrolment (AE) system for Ireland. This document has been drafted to underpin a consultation process, to help improve the decisions that need to be made in terms of the operational structure and design of AE for Ireland. However, the Strawman should not, in any way, be construed as a confirmation of what form AE will ultimately take or as a document that is intending to provide ‘all of the answers’. It is a high level draft intended to generate and prompt discussion and improve ideas.

In the Roadmap for Pensions Reform 2018-2023, the Government confirmed that under an AE system, the State will support employees by financially incentivising retirement saving. Moreover, the Government believes that any financial incentive for AE should be effectively communicated, easily understood and appreciated. For the purpose of the Strawman, the State’s incentive for people to participate in the system is presented as a contribution worth €1 for every €3 that the employee contributes towards their retirement savings account. Under the Strawman proposals, any AE contributions made by the State will replace, rather than augment, existing tax reliefs.

The Strawman makes clear the value and the mechanism for providing this incentive will only be finalised following the public consultation. The Strawman also refers to a separate review of the cost of funded supplementary pensions to the Exchequer, which is currently being carried out by the Interdepartmental Pensions Reform and Taxation Group, chaired by the Department of Finance. The outcomes of these processes, together with further detailed analysis and evidence building, will inform future Government decisions relating to the level of financial incentive for AE and the most appropriate manner in which this incentive should be delivered.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

1265. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason for the delay in making a decision on an application by persons (details supplied) for a disability allowance. [36293/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): There is no record of an application for disability allowance (DA) for the first named person in this question.

The second named person submitted an application for DA on 9 October 2017. Their application, based upon all the evidence submitted, was refused on medical grounds as it was not found that this gentleman was substantially restricted in taking up employment. It was also refused on failing to supply information requested by my department.

The person concerned was notified in writing of this decision on 28 May 2018. An appeal was received from this gentleman on 21 June 2018. He also submitted further medical evidence and some of the information previously requested on 12 March 2018.

A request for the outstanding information has been sent to the person concerned. On receipt of this information his claim will be reviewed prior to submitting documents to the Social Welfare Appeals Office.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the deputy.

Invalidity Pension Appeals

1266. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the position regarding a social welfare appeal by a person (details supplied) in relation to their claim for invalidity pension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36318/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 22nd May 2018. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. These papers were received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 28th June 2018 and the case will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

1267. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the position regarding a review of an application by a person (details supplied) for carer's allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36319/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is

habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a person who has such a disability that they require that level of care.

An application for CA was received from the person concerned on 22 November 2016.

It is a condition for receipt of CA that every claimant shall furnish such certificates, documents, information and evidence as may be required for the purposes of deciding their claim.

Following the completion of the SWI investigation, a deciding officer decided on 06 July 2018 that CA could only be awarded from 18 January 2018 as the person concerned had failed to provide evidence as to the nature and degree of his employment prior to that date.

The person concerned was notified on 12 July 2018 of this decision, the reason for it and of his right of review and appeal.

A request for review was received on 24 July 2018, however as the person concerned has not provided any new information regarding his caring duties, employment or means prior to 18 January 2018, the outcome of the review is that the original decision remains unchanged.

The person concerned was notified on 1 August 2018 of this outcome, the reason for it and of his right of appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Occupational Injuries Benefit Payments

1268. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason payment of occupational injuries benefit to a person (details supplied) ceased; if same will now issue to them; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36320/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Department has recently introduced a new claim form (called “IB1”) and a new medical certificate (called “MED1”) to replace the previous MC1 and MC2 forms for certification of the Department’s Illness and Injury Benefit schemes. This change is part of a programme of modernisation in the Department’s Illness Benefit section which took effect from Monday 6th August. The Department’s intention in implementing this modernisation programme - including the changes to forms - is to improve the certification processes and to make claim and payment procedures more efficient for everyone involved – GPs, patients and the Department.

Some GPs have continued to use the old forms after this changeover date. In order to facilitate the continued payment of Illness and Injury Benefit to our customers, the Department has, to date, continued to accept old MC1 and MC2 forms where provided by GPs. While the continued use of old forms is causing delays to our processing times, the Department is doing everything possible to ensure that customers are paid as quickly as possible.

The person concerned made an Occupational Injury Benefit claim from 15/06/2018. Payment was issued up to 02/08/2018 on foot of MC2 medical certificates.

The payment delay occurred as a result of the use of the old forms, as opposed to the new MED1 certificates. However, all payments have now been issued and the claim is up to date.

I hope this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

Question No. 1269 answered with Question No. 1218.

Illness Benefit Eligibility

1270. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if illness benefit will issue to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36355/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Illness Benefit is a short term scheme intended for persons who are unable to work due to illness or injury. It is paid while the incapacitated person remains unable to work and continues to meet the conditions of the scheme. There is, however, a maximum payment period of two years after which payment will cease.

The person concerned made an Illness Benefit claim on 03/05/2017. My Department has reviewed the claim and has issued all arrears due to him.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Appeals

1271. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a disability allowance for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36366/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer, having fully considered all of the available evidence, has decided to disallow the appeal of the person concerned by way of a summary decision. The person concerned has been notified of the Appeals Officer's decision.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Appeals

1272. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied) for a disability allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36367/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 21st June 2018. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. These papers were received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 4th July 2018 and were referred to an Appeals Officer on 20th August 2018, who will make a summary decision on the appeal

based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals Status

1273. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36370/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer, having fully considered all of the available evidence, has decided to allow the appeal of the person concerned by way of a summary decision. The person concerned has been notified of the Appeals Officer's decision.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Payments

1274. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an illness benefit payment for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36381/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Illness Benefit (IB) is a payment for persons who are unable to work due to illness and who satisfy certain PRSI contribution conditions. During the course of a claim a person can be referred for examination by one of my Department's Medical Assessors to ensure that the conditions for receipt of the payment continue to be satisfied.

In the case of the person referred to by the Deputy, IB was disallowed from 27th June 2017 as it was held that it had not been proven that the person concerned was incapable of work.

The decision was appealed and, following a revised decision by the independent Appeals Office, the appeal has been allowed.

The person concerned was paid as a qualifying adult on their spouse's IB claim during the period they appealed the disallowance of their claim.

All arrears due from 27th June 2017 to 15th July 2017, when his entitlement to IB ended, were paid on 6th June 2018. However, arrears of €362.95 were withheld to offset the amount paid to him as a qualifying adult on his spouse's IB claim.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Payments

1275. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason for the delay in issuing illness benefit payments; if she will clarify same with regard to the change in the processing system for sick certificates; the way in which this change was communicated to those in receipt of the payment and to general practitioners that are required to fill out the forms; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36382/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection has recently introduced a new claim form (called “IB1”) and a new medical certificate (called “MED1”) to replace the previous MC1 and MC2 forms for certification of the Department’s Illness and Injury Benefit schemes. This change is part of a programme of modernisation in the Department’s Illness Benefit section which took effect from Monday 6th August. The Department’s intention in implementing this modernisation programme - including the changes to forms - is to improve the certification processes and to make claim and payment procedures more efficient for everyone involved – GPs, patients and the Department. The introduction of the new forms was discussed with the Irish Medical Organisation in advance.

The majority of certificates and claim forms being received each day by the Department are the new scannable versions and these claims are being paid without any delays.

Some GPs have continued to use the old forms after this changeover date. In order to facilitate the continued payment of Illness and Injury Benefit to our customers, the Department has, to date, continued to accept old MC1 and MC2 forms where provided by GPs. While the continued use of old forms has been causing delays to our processing times, my Department is doing everything possible to ensure that customers are paid as quickly as possible.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Partial Capacity Benefit Scheme Applications

1276. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason a partial capacity benefit application has been refused in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36384/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Partial Capacity Benefit (PCB) is a social welfare scheme which allows a person who has been in receipt of Illness Benefit for six months and who may not have full capacity for work, to return to employment and continue to receive a partial or full payment from my Department. An Illness Benefit customer who applies for PCB will, in the first instance, be assessed by a Medical Assessor who will review the restriction, if any, on their capacity for work. A person assessed with a moderate level of work incapacity will receive 50% of their current payment, a person assessed with a severe level will receive 75% of their payment and a person assessed with a profound level will get full payment.

The person concerned currently has a claim for Illness Benefit and has made an application for Partial Capacity Benefit (PCB). This application was received on 19th June 2018. The application has been referred to a Medical Assessor for an opinion on the level of work restriction. The person concerned has now had their application assessed and a letter has issued to him with the result.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy

Disability Allowance Applications

1277. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied) for disability allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36386/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I confirm that an application from this gentleman for disability allowance (DA) was received by the Department on 13 April 2018.

The processing time for individual DA claims may vary in accordance with their relative complexity in terms of the three main qualifying criteria, the person's circumstances and the information they provide in support of their claim.

The application has been referred to a Social Welfare Inspector (SWI) for a report on the person's means and circumstances. Once the SWI has submitted his/her report to DA section, a decision will be made on the application and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

1278. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied) for a disability allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36387/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The person concerned submitted an application for disability allowance (DA) on 23 May 2018. Their application, based upon all the evidence submitted, was refused on medical grounds as it was not found that this lady was substantially restricted in taking up employment. She was also deemed to have means in excess of the statutory limit for her circumstances.

The person concerned was notified in writing of this decision on 23 August 2018 and was also notified of their right to request a review of this decision or to appeal it to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO). No request for an appeal or review has been received.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

1279. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied) for a disability allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36388/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The person concerned submitted an application for disability allowance (DA) on 13 April 2018. Their application, based upon all the evidence submitted,

was refused on medical grounds as it was not found that this lady was substantially restricted in taking up employment. She was also deemed to have means in excess of the statutory limit for her circumstances.

The person concerned was notified in writing of this decision on 20 June 2018 and was also notified of their right to request a review of this decision or to appeal it to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO). No request for an appeal or review has been received.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the deputy.

Departmental Communications

1280. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the position in her Department and the organisations under its aegis that have arrangements in place for lo-call numbers or 1800, 1850 and 1890 phone numbers for members of the public to contact her Department or organisations under its aegis; the number of these that are completely free to call to persons that use mobile phones and may incur major bills phoning such organisations; if the situation will be reviewed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36398/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Telephone is an important communications channel for many of my Department's customers and measures aimed at reducing the potential costs for callers have been in operation for many years.

Among them is the use of "LoCall" numbers, operated through the "1890" platform. These numbers, coupled with interactive voice response technology have combined to facilitate customers making quick contact with the appropriate section of the Department at a low cost to the caller, when calling from a landline number.

"1890" is just one of a group of non-geographic numbers (NGNs) which are used by a wide variety of service providers in Ireland. The original intention underpinning the use of this facility by my Department was to enable customers to make national calls for the equivalent cost of a local call.

The telecommunications landscape in Ireland has changed significantly since then and I am aware that these numbers were introduced at a time when landlines predominated. As such, I am also aware that "1890" numbers do not always result in a cost saving. In fact, in some cases, calls to NGNs such as the "1890" numbers can cost significantly more, as these numbers, by their very nature, are non-geographic, and they are often not included in "bundles" of call minutes to landlines.

I am aware that the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg) is undertaking a review of the five different classes of NGNs, including 1890 numbers at present. While not yet complete, ComReg has proposed a number of measures aimed at addressing a range of issues, including that of call costs and has published a response to its latest round of consultations with a range of interested parties. That publication is entitled "Review of Non-Geographic Numbers: Response to Consultation and Draft Decision – Reference ComReg 18/65 – 11/07/2018".

My Department is currently in the process of reviewing the use of NGNs as part of a wider review of its telephone policy and is considering the possible and likely implications of ComReg's recent publications on this topic.

In the meantime, and mindful of the cost of “LoCall” numbers for some customers, my Department endeavours to ensure that where “LoCall” numbers are listed on the Departments website, that a landline number is always listed first, ahead of the available “LoCall” number. Furthermore, where “LoCall” numbers are listed on the website, they are accompanied by a notification advising customers that the rates charged for the use of same may vary among different service providers. Also, please be advised that if customers have any concerns about call charges, the staff of my Department will always facilitate a call back.

Besides a range of “LoCall” numbers, my Department also offers a Freephone service for callers wishing to contact the Homeless Women, Families and New Communities, and Homeless Men’s Units. A dedicated team handles high volumes of calls to these services via the Freephone (“1800”) number provided by my Department.

Finally, the Deputy refers to the arrangements in place regarding NGNs within agencies that fall under the remit of my Department. Offices and statutory bodies within that category are wide ranging, and include the General Register Office (GRO), the Social Welfare Appeals Office, the Social Welfare Tribunal, the Pensions Council, the Citizens Information Board, the Pensions Authority, the Office of the Pensions Ombudsman and the Low Pay Commission. As protocols in place to manage the use of NGNs is an operational policy matter, responsibility for same is held locally. Therefore, I am not in a position to comment in this regard.

I trust this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Applications

1281. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person (details supplied) will be entitled to apply for an invalidity pension. [36409/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Invalidity pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

The Department has received an application for IP from the person concerned on two separate occasions; on 20 January 2016 and 5 January 2018. Both applications were disallowed on the grounds that the contribution conditions for the scheme were not satisfied.

There is no record of an appeal of either decision having been made by the person concerned. It is open to the person concerned to re-apply for IP should they so wish.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Working Family Payment Applications

1282. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied). [36412/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Working Family Payment (WFP) is a weekly tax-free payment which provides additional income support to employees on low earnings with children.

An application for WFP was received from the person concerned on 23rd July 2018.

7 September 2018

The applicant was awarded WFP with effect from 22nd March 2018 to 6th June 2018. The award period was effective to 06th June 2018 only as the applicant's relevant employment ceased on 04th June 2018. The total payment owing was issued to the applicant's nominated bank account as arrears on 26th July 2018.

The person concerned commenced new employment with effect from 5th June 2018.

A new application for WFP was received from the applicant on 26th July 2018.

A Deciding Officer assessed the application on 30th July 2018 and awarded WFP with effect from 7th June 2018 to 05th June 2019.

The first payment and all arrears owing issued to the person's nominated bank account on Thursday 2nd August 2018. All weekly payments have issued to date.

The person concerned was notified on 30th July 2018 of this decision and of the right of review and appeal.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Applications

1283. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied) for an invalidity pension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36413/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Invalidity Pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

The Department received a claim for IP for the lady referred to on 23 August 2018. The claim will be processed as quickly as possible and she will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Partial Capacity Benefit Scheme Applications

1284. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied) for a partial capacity benefit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36426/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Partial Capacity Benefit (PCB) is a social welfare scheme which allows a person who has been in receipt of Illness Benefit for six months or Invalidity Pension and who may not have full capacity for work, to return to employment and continue to receive a partial or full payment from my Department.

An Invalidity Pension customer who applies for PCB will, in the first instance, be assessed by a Medical Assessor who will review the restriction, if any, on their capacity for work. A person assessed with a moderate level of work incapacity will receive 50% of their current payment, a person assessed with a severe level will receive 75% of their payment and a person assessed with a profound level will get full payment.

The person concerned currently has a claim for Invalidity Pension and there is no record of an application for Partial Capacity Benefit. If person concerned wishes to apply now, she should complete and forward an application to the Partial Capacity Benefit Section.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Media Monitoring

1285. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the 100 keywords that her Department will provide to a contracted service for its social media monitoring projects; the rationale for the way in which the keywords were chosen; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36446/18]

1286. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason she is seeking a comprehensive social media monitoring and analysis service for her Department; the name of the social media channels for which her Department will require these services; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36447/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1285 and 1286 together.

The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection is currently tendering for a number of related media monitoring services.

The tender for the provision of “a media monitoring service to the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection” details the Department’s requirements in terms of three individual service “Lots”. Lot 1 is for Print and Digital Media Monitoring, Lot 2 is for Broadcast Media Monitoring and Lot 3 is for Social Media Monitoring.

Daily media monitoring provides the Department with an important understanding of policy issues, economic issues and customer issues that may have implications for the Department’s customers and other stakeholders, and indeed the Department itself. The ability to monitor media coverage and respond quickly to issues impacting our customers and stakeholders is very important, especially given the scale and nature of the Department’s schemes and services, and the wide range of customers it serves on a daily basis.

The media landscape has changed in recent years and greater use of digital and social media means that policy, economic and customer issues are often communicated on social media in the first instance. Social media, therefore, represents an important potential news source for the Department.

As is clearly stated on the first page of the Tender document, “tenderers should be aware that the Contracting Authority may elect to proceed with one, two, or all three Lots, as determined by cost and business need”. The inclusion of a Social Media monitoring service in Lot 3 clearly does not commit the Department to procuring such a service now or in the future, but makes provision for this service.

As the tender process is ongoing, it would not be appropriate to provide further information at this time.

National Carers’ Strategy Funding

1287. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the community supports for carers for persons with dementia; her plans to expand the support levels for carers for persons with dementia; her plans to meet dementia advocacy groups to discuss increases in funding in the context of budget 2019; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36448/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Government acknowledges the crucial role that family carers play and is fully committed to supporting carers in that role. This commitment is recognised in both the Programme for a Partnership Government and the National Carers' Strategy.

My Department provides a range of income support payments that support those who are caring in their communities for family members, friends or neighbours, who as a result of an illness or disability require full-time care and attention. The income supports for people who are providing full-time care include carer's benefit, carer's allowance (including half-rate carer's allowance), domiciliary care allowance and the annual carer's support grant. The value of these income supports are kept under review and have been increased in recent budgets.

In addition, my department has secured €1 million of funding under the 2018 Dormant Account Fund to provide a range of training and supports for Home Carers. This measure is additional to the €1 million allocated under the 2017 Dormant Accounts Action Plan and both will be rolled out together. The measure includes the provision of structured training, information and support networks. The measure will be administered and managed by Pobal on behalf of the Department of Employment Affairs Social Protection in accordance with Pobal's service agreement with the Department of Rural and Community Development.

Other government agencies most notably the Health Service also provide supports to carers. I would draw the Deputy's attention to the HSE plan for Dementia, Understand Together: www.understandtogether.ie.

I and my Department meet regularly with groups representing carers to discuss mutual priorities. My Department hosts an annual pre-budget forum, which provides an opportunity for sectoral groups including carer organisations to provide submissions on their Budget priorities. As Minister, I regularly meet advocacy groups to discuss issues relevant to the policies and responsibilities of my Department. My Department organises the annual National Carers Forum as part of implementation of the National Carers Strategy.

I can assure the Deputy that I will continue to keep the range of supports available to carers and people with disabilities under review. Any additional improvements or additions to these supports would have to be considered in a budgetary context.

I hope this clarifies the issue for the Deputy.

JobPath Programme

1288. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the way in which persons are chosen to participate in JobPath; the way in which persons are selected to enter JobPath for a second time; if there is a maximum number of times a person may be sent to engage with the JobPath programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36454/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): JobPath is an employment activation initiative designed to support long-term unemployed people

and those most at risk of becoming long-term unemployed to secure and sustain full time paid employment or self-employment. The roll-out of JobPath began in 2015 and to date 160,000 participants have entered JobPath since it was first initialised.

All Jobseekers on the live register must be available for and actively seeking full time employment, they are also required to engage with the Department's activation services.

Participants for JobPath are chosen by means of a random selection process.

Protocols for selection currently preclude the selection of anyone who has already completed 52 weeks on the JobPath programme within the previous four months.

If, however, at the end of the specified period the jobseeker has not engaged in other activation supports and services they then become eligible for selection for a second period of activation on the JobPath programme.

A Personal Advisor will then review their previous experience with JobPath and agree a new personal progression plan with actions based on their previous engagement and identified barriers to sustainable employment.

There is no current limit in place to the number of times a client can be referred to the Job Path service. The Job Path service is currently in year three of a four year contract term.

I trust this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

Child Benefit Eligibility

1289. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a matter raised by an association (details supplied) will be examined; her views on the plan to disallow some parents this right; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36460/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Child Benefit is a universal payment to help families with the cost of raising children and plays an important role in tackling child poverty. It provides assistance to households with children in recognition of the higher costs incurred in child-raising and child care in a way which allows choice to parents in how this is undertaken. It does not rely on a means test or social insurance contributions.

Child Benefit is a monthly payment made to families with children in respect of all qualified children up to the age of 16 years. The payment continues to be paid in respect of children up to their 18th birthday who are in full-time education, or who have a disability. It is currently paid to around 629,000 families in respect of almost 1.2 million children, with an estimated expenditure of over €2 billion in 2018.

As Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, I support the universality of the Child Benefit payment, and the principle that all families with children should receive this income support. I do not intend introducing a means-test for Child Benefit. Means testing Child Benefit is not provided for in the Programme for Government, and is not being considered by Government.

Exceptional Needs Payment Applications

1290. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the timeframe for dealing with applications for assistance towards funeral expenses. [36481/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Under the supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme, the Department 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 out of their weekly income. The Government has provided over €36 million for exceptional and urgent needs payments in 2018.

An application can be made under the ENP scheme for assistance with funeral and burial expenses where there is an inability to pay these costs, in part or in full, by the family of the deceased person without causing hardship.

When determining an entitlement to an ENP for funeral expenses the officer will take into account the circumstances of the individual applicant and that of the deceased person including any savings, property, insurance policies etc. that would render the applicant or anybody else liable and/or in a position to pay for the funeral costs. If a bereavement grant is available from any other source including former employer, credit union or trade union, this will also be taken into account.

The timescale for determining applications may be dependent, among other things, on the availability of supporting documents needed to consider the application. Provision of a prompt service is a major objective for the Department's staff, especially for the SWA scheme which is the safety net within the social welfare system.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Appeals

1291. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36482/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): On receipt of additional medical evidence submitted in support of the appeal of the person concerned, a review of the claim was carried out by a deciding officer and she has been awarded invalidity pension with effect from 07 December 2017. As a result the appeal is no longer necessary.

Payment will issue to her nominated bank account on 20 September 2018. Any arrears due from 07 December 2017 to 19 September 2018 (less any overlapping social welfare payment) will issue in due course. The lady in question was notified of this decision on 31 August 2018.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Payments

1292. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if illness benefit will issue to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36501/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Illness Benefit is a short term scheme intended for persons who are unable to work due to illness or injury. It is paid while the incapacitated person remains unable to work and continues to meet the conditions of the scheme. There is, however, a maximum payment period of two years after which payment will cease.

The person concerned made an illness benefit claim from 07/08/2018. Payment of Illness Benefit was awarded from 14/08/2018 and all payments have issued to date.

I hope this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Code

1293. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason stamps were not credited to a person (details supplied). [36510/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The person concerned was in receipt of disability allowance (DA) from 25 April 2007 to 25 February 2014.

While in receipt of DA, you may qualify for credits if you have paid or credited PRSI contributions at PRSI Class A, B, C, D, E, H or P in either of the last two tax years.

For the two years prior to receiving DA the person concerned was self-employed and paid an S Class PRSI contribution. This means that he is not entitled to credits for the period that he was in receipt of DA.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Homemakers Scheme

1294. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to her Department's policy and practice of not displaying homemakers credits on a person's social insurance record but only taking them into account when a person's pension application is submitted and calculated; her views on whether it is preferable to display the homemaker's credits on the contribution statement as they accrue, ensuring better clarity and transparency for persons; if the practice will be changed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36522/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Homemaker scheme was introduced to make it easier for those who provide full-time care for children or for an incapacitated person to qualify for a higher rate of payment under the State Pension (Contributory), as calculated under the current Yearly Average system. The scheme came into effect on 6 April 1994 and applies to both men and women.

The homemakers scheme allows up to a maximum of 20 homemaking years to be disregarded for State Pension (Contributory) purposes. The homemakers scheme does not issue social insurance credits for the duration of this period, rather it disregards the years when calculating entitlement to the contributory state pension using the Yearly Average Calculation. A small number of credits are awarded at the start of the year the period began, and at the end of the year it was completed. This disregard and those credits are only awarded for the purpose of a State pension (contributory) claim. They may not be used to qualify for any other payment which a

person might apply for when of working age.

In May my Department launched a public consultation on the introduction of a Total Contributions Approach to calculating the contributory state pension. Although we are now deliberating on the submissions to the consultation, a move towards introducing homemakers credits to replace the “disregard” is likely (as signposted in the National Pensions Framework).

How these credits will be communicated to those who have earned them is just one of many technical and logistical issues that will be addressed before we seek to finalise a proposal. My ambition, however, is that the more simplified nature of the Total Contributions Approach will allow us make more useful information available to future pensioners, than is possible under the current system.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Commencement of Legislation

1295. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the sections of the Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2017 that have been commenced to date; when all sections of the Bill will be enacted in full; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36524/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2017 was published on 7th December 2017. The Bill delivers on the commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government to tackle the problems caused by the increased casualisation of work and to strengthen the regulation of precarious work. The key objective of the Bill is to improve the security and predictability of working hours for employees on insecure contracts and those working variable hours.

The Bill completed Report and Final Stage in the Dáil on 12th July 2018 and I anticipate that it will be introduced in the Seanad in the Autumn. As the Bill has not yet been enacted, no provisions have been commenced.

I will continue to work with colleagues on all sides of the Houses of the Oireachtas to progress this Bill as expeditiously as possible in order to deliver legislation that is fair, balanced and that works in practice.

Departmental Reports

1296. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a report (details supplied) on local employment and job club services will be published; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36523/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department commissioned Indecon to conduct a review of the Local Employment and Job Club services. This review is the first significant independent review that has been commissioned since the Local Employment Services (LES) and Job Clubs were established and it will help inform future decisions regarding how the Department contracts, monitors and procures for these services.

The final report is currently with my officials. The findings of the report will be discussed with the contractors in quarter 3 and their observations sought. The report contains contractual

and performance information relating to some 63 contractors and my Department must consider any obligations under the terms of the existing contracts before deciding whether it is appropriate to publicise the reports in their entirety.

Social Welfare Benefits Payments

1297. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if changes will be made as part of budget discussions to social welfare payments that take place from 1 January 2019 in line with the date changes to taxation that are made, thereby treating all persons fairly; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36525/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): On Budget Day last year, I was pleased to announce a €5 increase in the maximum rates of all weekly social welfare payments at a cost of €264 million in 2018. This built on a similar increase provided in Budget 2017, which was the first across the board rate increase since 2009.

Budget 2018 increases commenced in March. In the context of budgetary parameters, payment from January would have necessitated either a smaller rate of increase, or excluding certain groups benefitting from the increase. Neither of these options were considered acceptable to Government.

The appropriate rates of social welfare payments will be considered by Government in the context of budgetary deliberations, in light of available resources and other priorities.

Pension Provisions

1298. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when improvements to pension calculations announced on 23 January 2018 for post-2012 pensioners will be implemented; when the relevant pensioners will be contacted regarding these changes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36548/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): On 23 January last, this Government agreed to a proposal that will allow pensioners affected by the 2012 changes in rate bands to have their pension entitlement calculated on a Total Contributions basis, including provision for up to 20 years of a new home caring credit.

Legislation has to be drafted and enacted to enable implementation of these arrangements, and a number of options regarding the best approach to passing that legislation are being considered. In addition, an information technology system has to be developed in line with the legislation. My Department is currently working on both of these. As I've said previously, it is still planned to commence the reviews before the end of this year, with the first payments being made in the first quarter of 2019. In this regard, the commitment we made in January for the payments to be dated from 26 March last still stands.

It is not necessary for people to contact the Department on this matter. Once the legislation is enacted and the systems and processes are ready, my Department will write to the people impacted and provide them with the opportunity to have their pension calculation reviewed.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Appeals

1299. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an appeal for a domiciliary care allowance by a person (detail supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36575/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer, having fully considered all of the available evidence, has decided to allow the appeals of the person concerned by way of a summary decision. The person concerned has been notified of the Appeals Officer's decision.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Appeals

1300. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a domiciliary care allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36576/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that the appeal from the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer who has decided to convene an oral hearing in this case.

Every effort will be made to hear the case as quickly as possible and the person concerned will be informed when arrangements for the oral hearing have been made.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Applications Data

1301. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the figures and waiting time for invalidity pension applications in July 2017 compared to July 2018. [36581/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Invalidation pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

The table shows the number of applications for Invalidation Pension received in July 2017 compared to July 2018 and the average time taken to award a new claim for each month.

Month	No of applications	Processing time
July 2017	777	6 weeks
July 2018	764	7 weeks

The Department is committed to ensuring that claims and reviews are processed as expeditiously as possible.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Allowance Data

1302. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the full-year cost of eliminating the reduced rates of jobseeker's allowance for persons under 26 years of age; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36591/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The rationale for having reduced rates of payment for young jobseekers in receipt of a means-tested jobseeker's payment is to prevent young people from entering welfare dependency by providing a strong financial incentive to take up a job, or a training or education programme.

In this regard, young jobseekers who participate in an education, training or employment programme currently qualify for the maximum weekly rate of payment. Age-related reduced rates of payment also do not apply in certain circumstances, such as when the claimant has a dependent child, or transferred to Jobseeker's Allowance from Disability Allowance, or was in State care during the 12 months prior to applying for Jobseeker's Allowance.

The estimated full year cost in 2019 of increasing the age-related reduced rates of Jobseeker's Allowance for persons under the age of 26, from €107.70 per week and €152.80 per week to €198 per week, is €59.75 million. This cost includes increasing the €107.70 qualified adult rate to €131.40 per week.

It should be noted that the above costing is subject to change in the context of emerging trends and associated revision of the estimated numbers of recipients for 2019.

Pensions Reform

1303. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of the investigations her Department has carried out with regard to applying PRSI contributions and entitlements for those in receipt of the carer's allowance in order to allow them to qualify for contributory pensions when they reach pension age; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36604/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): On 23 January, the Government agreed to a proposal that will allow pensioners affected by the 2012 changes in rate bands to have their pension entitlement calculated by a new "Total Contributions Approach" (TCA) which will include up to 20 years of a new HomeCaring credit. This approach is expected to significantly benefit many people, particularly women, whose work history includes an extended period of time outside the paid workplace, while raising families or in a caring role. It will make it easier for pensioners assessed under the yearly average model, to qualify for a higher rate of the State Pension (contributory). The TCA will ensure that the totality of a person's social insurance contributions - as opposed to the timing of them - determines a final pension outcome.

Under the new arrangements a person who reached pension age after 1 September 2012 and has a 40 year record of paid and credited social insurance contributions, subject to a maximum of 20 years of the new HomeCaring credits, will qualify for a maximum contributory pension

where they satisfy the other qualifying conditions for the scheme. Crucially, unlike the existing Homemakers disregard system, periods of home-caring before that scheme was introduced in 1994 may be recognised under the new scheme.

Up to 10 years of other credits, for example when unemployed or ill, may also be used, subject to the total number of credits not exceeding 20 years. So, for example, a person might receive a maximum pension based on 20 years paid PRSI contributions, 5 years jobseeker credits, and 15 years HomeCaring Credits, over a 50 year period.

The new TCA for pensioners assessed under the 2012 rate band changes, came into effect from 30 March 2018. Pensioners do not need to contact the Department at this juncture. Instead, the Department will invite pensioners who were assessed under the current rate bands in place since 2012 to have their pensions recalculated under TCA to determine if they qualify for a higher rate of entitlement.

Legislation is currently being prepared to enact these changes. Following the passing of this legislation, the Department expects to begin sending out these invitations before the end of the year and to begin making payments, including arrears for any period from 30 March 2018, from Quarter 1 of 2019.

These arrangements are expected to benefit many people who are or who have been in receipt of Carer's Allowance, subject to them satisfying the other conditions regarding the State pension contributory. If they do not satisfy those conditions, but they have been eligible for the means-tested Carer's Allowance, it is likely that they will qualify for the means-tested State pension (non-contributory), the maximum rate of which is over 95% that of the maximum rate of the State pensions contributory.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Further Education and Training Programmes

1304. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to review the level of training supports available for persons who are unemployed but cannot receive jobseeker's allowance due to the fact that their spouses are working; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36628/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Referrals to training supports by my Department are focused on those in receipt of qualifying welfare payments.

Unemployed persons who are not in receipt of welfare support have access to Solas training supports. As you know Solas is a statutory agency that operates under the aegis of the Department of Education and Skills, which has responsibility the management, co-ordination and supporting the delivery of Further Education and Training by the Education and Training Boards. I would suggest that any such person is advised to inquire with their local Education Training Board to assess what supports may be available to them.

It is also open to any unemployed person to contact my Department's Public Employment Service at their local Intreo centre to discuss the options that may be available to them.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pensions Reform

1305. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of the proposed changes to the pension system in 2020; the nature of these changes; the proposals for same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36629/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): As a general policy, the Government intends to introduce a Total Contributions Approach (TCA) to establishing level of entitlement for all new state pension contributory claims from 2020 onwards. I launched a public consultation on this proposal earlier this year in May. This closed last Monday, the 3rd of September. My Department has now started studying the submissions.

The consultation (which is still available for viewing on the Consultations Section of my Department's website) sought input on a range of relevant factors which included the amount of contributions needed for a full rate contributory state pension, the amount of credited contribution a person could avail of, and whether there would be a "phase-in period" for the changes.

Following examination and consideration of the submissions to the consultation, my officials will prepare proposals for the design of the new approach for consideration by the Government in due course.

I hope this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

Exceptional Needs Payment Applications

1306. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36633/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The applicant in this case applied for an Exceptional Needs Payment to cover the cost of private dental care. This application was refused by the Designated Person as private dental care is not considered an exceptional need. Following a review, the original decision of the Designated Person to refuse the application was upheld.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Applications Data

1307. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of invalidity pension applications from July 2017 to date by month in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36655/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Invalidation pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

The following table shows the number of IP claims received for each of the months requested.

Month	No. of Applications
Jul 2017	777
Aug 2017	982
Sep 2017	821
Oct 2017	801
Nov 2017	952
Dec 2017	827
Jan 2018	1,180
Feb 2018	1,067
Mar 2018	876
Apr 2018	815
May 2018	986
Jun 2018	805
Jul 2018	764

There was an increase of almost 7% in the number of applications for IP received for the year to end of July 2018 compared to the same period last year, following the extension of IP to self-employed contributors in December 2017.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Waiting Times

1308. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the current waiting times for the processing of applications for invalidity pension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36656/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Invalidity pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

The average time taken to award a new IP claim in August was ten weeks. The Department is committed to ensuring that claims and reviews are processed as expeditiously as possible.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension

1309. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if additional staff have been hired or allocated to the invalidity pension section due to a change in provisions (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36657/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Invalidity pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

IP was extended to self-employed contributors from 1 December 2017. Since the introduction of this budgetary measure to end of August 2018 there has been an increase of 9% in the number of applications received compared to the period from 1 December 2016 to end of August 2017.

Over this period, there has been no significant increase in the length time taken to process IP claims which would warrant the assignment of additional staff to the IP area.

The Department will continue to keep this situation under review to ensure that claims and reviews are processed as expeditiously as possible.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Benefit Applications

1310. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a carer's benefit application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36712/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's benefit (CARB) is a payment made to insured people who leave the workforce to care for a person(s) in need of full-time care and attention.

I confirm that my department received an application for CARB from the person concerned on the 3 August 2018.

The application is currently being processed and once completed, the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

1311. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for a domiciliary care allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36716/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): An application for Domiciliary Care Allowance was received from the person concerned on the 20th March 2018. The application was not allowed as the child was not considered to satisfy the qualifying conditions for the allowance. A letter issued on the 30th May 2018 setting out the decision of the deciding officer to refuse the allowance.

A review of this decision was requested on the 15th June 2018 and an appeal was also submitted on the 5th July 2018. The application will be re-examined by a deciding officer and a revised decision will be made if warranted. Alternatively, the case will be referred for consideration by the Social Welfare Appeals Office. The person concerned will be notified of the outcome of the deciding officer's review as soon as it is completed.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Redundancy Payments

1312. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) has not been facilitated with a redundancy package from a Tús supervisor position in view of the fact that such a package was first offered in April 2018; the reason for the protracted and ongoing delays in relation to same; when the person can avail of the redundancy package; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36756/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department provides a range of activation supports and programmes catering for long-term unemployed jobseekers and those most distant from the labour market. These supports include the Tús programme which is a work placement scheme that aims to provide short-term quality work opportunities for those who are unemployed while also assisting in providing certain services of benefit to communities.

If a Tús supervisor is made redundant by their employer and qualifies for a payment under the Redundancy Payments Acts 1967-2007, the supervisor would be entitled to statutory redundancy at a rate of two weeks' pay per year of service, plus a further week's pay (subject to an earnings limit of €600.00 per week).

My Department is very conscious of the valuable contribution the Tús scheme is making in the provision of services to individuals and communities across Ireland and will be doing all it can to ensure that any adjustment in supervisor and participant numbers will be implemented in an orderly manner to minimise disruption to all stakeholders.

Supplementary Welfare Allowance Eligibility

1313. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if persons with pulmonary hypertension will be facilitated when applying for assistance under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme to assist with high electricity costs associated with the use of oxygen to support breathing. [36775/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Department currently provides an electricity allowance, payable at the rate of €35 per month, as part of the household benefits package. The package is generally available to people living in the State, aged 66 years or over who are in receipt of a social welfare type payment or who satisfy a means test. The package is also available to carers and people with disabilities under the age of 66 who are in receipt of certain welfare type payments. Widows and widowers aged from 60 to 65 whose late spouses had been in receipt of the household benefits package retain that entitlement.

The supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme is considered the "safety net" within the overall social welfare system in that it provides assistance to eligible people in the State whose means are insufficient to meet their needs and those of their dependants. Under the SWA scheme, my Department may award a supplement to assist with ongoing or recurring costs that cannot be met from the client's own resources and are deemed to be necessary. In addition, the Department can make a single exceptional needs payment (ENP) to help meet essential, once-off expenditure, which a person could not reasonably be expected to meet out of their weekly income. Payments are made at the discretion of the officers administering the scheme taking into account the requirements of the legislation and all the relevant circumstances of the case.

Any person who consider they may have an entitlement under the SWA scheme should contact the Department's Community Welfare System at their local INTREO centre.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pensions

1314. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when the legislation to implement changes to the State pension system regarding the previous changes made in 2012 will be introduced; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36800/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): On 23 January last, this Government agreed to a proposal that will allow pensioners affected by the 2012 changes in rate bands to have their pension entitlement calculated on a Total Contributions basis, including provision for up to 20 years of a new home caring credit.

Legislation has to be enacted to enable implementation of these arrangements, and a number of options regarding the best approach to passing that legislation are being considered. In addition, an information technology system has to be developed in line with the legislation. My Department is currently working on both of these projects.

As I have stated previously, it is still planned to commence the reviews before the end of this year, with the first payments being made in the first quarter of 2019, backdated, where relevant, to the end of March 2018.

It is not necessary for people to contact the Department on this matter. Once the legislation is enacted and the systems and processes are ready, my Department will write to the people impacted and provide them with the opportunity to have their pension calculation reviewed.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Benefit Eligibility

1315. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person who has been made contractually redundant at 66 years of age will be automatically entitled to receive jobseeker's benefit until they reach 67 years of age in view of the fact that the State pension age is due to rise to 67 years of age; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36829/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2011 provided that State pension age will be increased gradually to 68 years. This began in January 2014 with the abolition of State pension (transition) which was available to people aged 65 who satisfied the qualifying conditions. This measure standardised the State pension age for all at 66 years. This will increase to 67 in 2021 and to 68 in 2028.

There is no statutory retirement age in the State and the age at which employees retire is a matter for the contract of employment between them and their employers. Where individuals exit the workforce prior to pension age they may apply for either jobseeker's benefit (JB) or jobseeker's allowance (JA).

JB is payable subject to the person satisfying the general scheme conditions. This entitlement is normally paid for 9 months (234 days) for people with 260 or more PRSI contributions paid and for 6 months (156 days) for people with fewer than 260 PRSI contributions paid. Arrangements are in place to provide that jobseekers whose benefit expires in their 65th year can generally continue to be paid benefit up until pensionable age (66 years) provided they satisfy the necessary contribution conditions. The Deputy is also advised that the disqualification

period for people who receive a redundancy payment of more than €50,000 does not apply to those who are aged 55 and over.

The jobseekers schemes are kept under review and any further changes, including entitlement beyond the 66th year, will be considered in that context.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy at this time.

Carer's Benefit Applications

1316. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a person (details supplied) that applied for carer's allowance on 9 March 2018 will receive a decision on their claim; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36836/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a person who has such a disability that they require that level of care.

I confirm that my department received an application for CA from the person concerned on the 9 March 2018.

A person can be considered to be providing full-time care and attention where they are engaged in employment, self-employment or on training courses outside the home for a maximum of 15 hours per week, provided that they can show to the satisfaction of a deciding officer that adequate care has been provided for the care recipient in their absence.

As the applicant is a self-employed farmer, the matter was referred to a local social welfare inspector (SWI) on 26 June 2018 to assess the level of care being provided, assess means and confirm that all the conditions for receipt of carer's allowance are satisfied.

Once the SWI has reported, a decision will be made and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Humanitarian Assistance Scheme

1317. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the amount of money paid out under the humanitarian assistance scheme per annum from 2010 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36894/18]

1318. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the average waiting times for payment under the humanitarian assistance scheme in 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36895/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1317 and 1318 together.

The Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government is the lead Department for severe weather emergencies and the Office of Public Works (OPW) has responsi-

bility for capital flood relief activities. However, my Department has an important role to play in assisting households in the immediate aftermath of emergency events such as flooding.

The purpose of the humanitarian assistance scheme is to prevent hardship by providing income-tested financial support to people whose homes are damaged from flooding and severe weather events and who are not in a position to meet costs for essential needs, household items and in some instances structural repair.

Expenditure under the scheme for the period from 2010 to 2017 is some €5.6 million and a yearly breakdown of this expenditure is provided in the following tabular statement. Expenditure at end July 2018 is €321,000.

Following a severe weather event, staff in the Department's Community Welfare Service, closely monitor the situation on the ground and engage with the relevant local authorities and other agencies to ensure supports are provided to those affected as swiftly as possible. Emergency income support payments to cover essential items such as food, clothing and personal items are quickly issued in the immediate aftermath of the event. Financial supports towards the replacement of white goods, basic furniture items and other essential household items may take longer as it is not until the flood water abates and houses dry out that the full extent of the damage to homes will become known. The longer term financial support covers necessary remedial works and can include plastering, dry-lining, relaying of floors, electrical re-wiring and painting. It could take several months before this stage of the response is completed and final payments issue. Statistics are not maintained on the average waiting times for payment.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Expenditure under the Humanitarian Assistance Scheme 2010 – 2018

Year	Outturn
	€000
2010	1,045
2011	1
2012	714
2013	118
2014	1,189
2015	233
2016	1,682
2017	613
2018 (July)	321

One-Parent Family Payment

1319. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason childcare fees are not considered as an expense in the eligibility for the one parent family payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36908/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department in general does not allow expenses to be considered in the context of means assessment. In this regard childcare costs are not considered in the means assessment of One-Parent Family payment (OFP), or any other social welfare payment.

In Budget 2018 I introduced a range of measures that would benefit lone parent families. Firstly from 29 March 2018 the weekly rates of payment increased by €5 and the qualified child payment increased by €2 per week.

The earnings disregard on the OFP increased from €110 per week to €130 per week allowing a lone parent on One-Parent Family payment to earn an additional €20 per week before it affects their payment.

Government policy is to provide additional supports for parents and their children through increased services rather than increased cash transfers. This includes such services as free early-years education through the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme, and enhanced provision of affordable childcare. These areas are a matter for my colleague the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs.

Child Care Costs

1320. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on the findings of a report (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36909/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I note the report referred to by the Deputy.

Government policy is to provide additional supports for parents and their children through increased services rather than increased cash transfers. This includes such services as free early-years education through the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme, and enhanced provision of affordable childcare. These areas are a matter for my colleague the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs.

However, it should be noted that in Budget 2018 I introduced a range of measures that would benefit lone parent families. Firstly from 29 March 2018 the weekly rates of payment increased by €5 and the qualified child payment increased by €2 per week.

The earnings disregard on the lone parent schemes increased from €110 per week to €130 per week allowing a lone parent on One-Parent Family payment or Jobseeker's Transitional payment to earn an additional €20 per week before it affects their payment.

Post Office Closures

1321. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the representations her Department has made to the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment in respect of proposed post office closures; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36973/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): This Government continues to be committed to maintaining the post office network and for An Post to remain a strong and viable company in a position to provide a high quality postal service and maintain a nationwide customer focussed network of post offices in the community. I understand that An Post and the Irish Postmasters Union (IPU) have agreed a plan for the future of the post office network that paves the way for a modernisation programme which should facilitate the development and renewal of the post office network.

The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection is an important customer of the company. The Department makes approximately 80 million Social Welfare payments per annum of which nearly 42% are by cash via the post office network. My Department's support and commitment to An Post is very apparent. Earlier this year we renewed the contract for cash payment services with the company. This contract is worth approximately €50m per annum to An Post.

Under the terms of the Department's contract with An Post for cash payment services, the company is obliged to maintain a network of outlets so as to ensure that 95% of welfare clients are within 15km of a post office in a rural area and within 3km of an outlet in an urban area.

The cash payment services contract is not a matter for the Department of Communications, Climate action and Environment but is the responsibility of my Department and An Post. My officials meet with An Post each month to monitor the terms of the contract and they have been assured by the company that the current voluntary closures do not affect this contractual obligation.

Local Authority Staff Remuneration

1322. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the full-year pay cost of senior positions (details supplied) in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35419/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department oversees workforce planning for the local government sector, including the monitoring of local government sector employment levels. To this end, my Department gathers quarterly data on staff numbers in local authorities; however, the data gathered does not provide details in terms of the number of Senior Executive Building Surveyors, Senior Executive Engineers, Executive Building Surveyors, Executive Engineers, Assistant Building Surveyors and Assistant Engineers in each local authority. Accordingly the information requested is not available in my Department, but may be obtained directly from individual local authorities.

A summary of the salary scales of the relevant grades is outlined in the following table.

Grades	Salary Scale
Senior Executive Building Surveyor	€63,909 – €79,286 (LSI2)
Executive Building Surveyor	€48,209 – €67,014 (LSI2)
Assistant Building Surveyor	€37,704 – €59,259(LSI2)
Senior Executive Engineer	€63,909– €79,286(LSI2)
Executive Engineer	€48,209 – €67,014 (LSI2)
Assistant Engineer	€37,704 – €59,259 (LSI2)

Housing Adaptation Grant

1323. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if there is a scheme available via the HSE to assist homeowners financially towards remedial works to their house for a family member who requires such alterations due to health circumstances; if so, the process for application through such a scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35623/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):

My Department provides funding to local authorities under the Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability to assist people in private houses to make their accommodation more suitable for their needs. The suite of grants includes the Housing Adaptation Grant for People with a Disability, the Mobility Aids Grant and the Housing Aid for Older People, which are 80% funded by the Department, with a 20% contribution from the resources of each local authority.

The Housing Adaptation Grant for People with a Disability assists people with a disability to have necessary adaptations, repairs or improvement works carried out in order to make their accommodation more suitable for their needs. Grants of up to €30,000 are available for works including the provision of access ramps, stair lifts, accessible toilet and shower facilities, wheelchair access and extensions.

The Mobility Aids Grant is available to fast track grants of up to €6,000 to cover a basic suite of works to address the mobility problems of a member of a household. Qualifying works include the provision of stair lifts, level access showers, access ramps, grab rails and some minor adaptation works.

The Housing Aid for Older People scheme provides grants of up to €8,000 to assist older people living in poor housing conditions to have necessary repairs or improvements carried out. Grant eligible works include structural repairs or improvements, re-wiring, repairs to or replacement of windows and doors, provision of water supply and sanitary facilities, provision of heating etc.

The detailed administration of these schemes, including the application, assessment, approval and payment of grants to applicants under the various measures, is the responsibility of the relevant local authority.

Free Travel Scheme Eligibility

1324. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason Leap cards are only being given to homeless families during school terms despite the fact that many of the families in emergency accommodation are placed in hotels and hubs far from their family and support networks and have the same travel requirements during school holidays as during term time; and if he will reconsider this policy. [35632/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):

Arising from the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, my Department is funding an initiative to provide homeless families residing in hotel accommodation and family hubs in the Dublin Region with access to free public transport for essential school journeys.

The Dublin Region Homeless Executive is overseeing implementation of this initiative and, working in partnership with the National Transport Authority, has put arrangements in place for the provision of Leap cards to homeless families under this initiative. Given that Leap cards have an inbuilt value limit, the cards are being made available to homeless families on an on-going basis throughout the academic year, via Focus Ireland's State-funded Family Homelessness Action Teams. Outside of this arrangement, the Community Welfare Service of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection considers, on a case-by-case basis, providing for costs associated with the transport needs of homeless families under the Exceptional Needs Payments scheme.

Social and Affordable Housing Funding

1325. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when funding will be available for a rural cottage scheme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36166/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Local authorities have a number of options available to them in meeting social housing needs. These include, if they consider it appropriate, the transfer of a site from a person qualified for social housing to the local authority, and the building of a social house on the site by the local authority, to be tenanted by the person who transferred the site. I understand that the scheme referred to by the Deputy was of this type.

It is of course open to any person who is qualified for social housing support to make any particular proposal to the relevant local authority, for their consideration, in connection with the provision of a site. However, the actual operation of such an approach to social housing provision continues to be a matter for the relevant local authority concerned.

Legislative Process

1326. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the timeframe to publish the Bill to ban the use of microplastics; the progress to date on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36295/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The preparation of a General Scheme of a Bill to provide for the prohibition of the manufacture, import, export or sale of certain products containing plastic microbeads is at an advanced stage. A Draft Regulatory Impact Analysis will be uploaded to my Department's website shortly.

The target is to publish the Bill in the 2018 autumn/winter legislative session.

Housing Data

1327. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if a cost analysis has been undertaken to evaluate the potential cost per year to the State to house persons who have had their home repossessed by a bank; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36332/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My focus, and that of the Government, is to ensure that as many households as possible remain in their homes and in this regard a range of measures are currently being implemented across Government Departments and agencies. These actions are focused on encouraging those in mortgage distress to reach a long term debt resolution, avoid repossession and remain in their home if possible.

One of the measures that has been introduced is a national mortgage arrears resolution service, known as Abhaile, which is provided free of charge to the borrower and its aim is to help mortgage holders in arrears to find the best solutions and keep them, wherever possible, in their own homes. The unique element of Abhaile is that it brings together, for the first time, the full range of supports and services required by borrowers in home mortgage arrears. The Money Advice and Budgetary Service (MABS) acts as the gateway for the service and can be contacted

by telephoning 076-1072000 or by accessing their website at the following link www.mabs.ie/abhaile.

The Mortgage to Rent (MTR) scheme introduced in 2012 and administered by the Housing Agency on behalf of my Department is targeted at those households in arrears whose mortgage is unsustainable and who are eligible for social housing support. Under the scheme an eligible household with an unsustainable mortgage goes from being a homeowner to becoming a social housing tenant of an Approved Housing Body (AHB). The borrower voluntarily surrenders their property to their lender who in turn sells the property to an AHB. The AHB becomes the landlord and the household can remain in the family home as a social housing tenant. The tenant pays a differential rent to the AHB, based on their income, which is designed to be affordable. The MTR scheme is an established part of the overall suite of social housing options and an important part of the mortgage arrears resolution process.

A Review of the MTR Scheme, published on 8 February 2017, introduced a range of amendments to the eligibility criteria and administration of the scheme in order to improve its operation. The Review, available at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/changes-in-mortgage-to-rent-scheme/>, explored the avenues and impediments to participation in the scheme and recommended a number of actions to make the scheme work better for borrowers. My Department and the Housing Agency are working with all stakeholders to ensure that the actions set out in the Review are being effectively implemented to benefit a greater number of households. The eligibility requirements of the scheme were widened to include a greater number of borrowers and a larger number of property types. Increasing awareness and understanding of the scheme has been a priority and a new website - www.mortgagetorent.ie - dedicated to guiding and advising borrowers has been developed. In addition, new structures and arrangements have been put in place to encourage a greater number of entities to take part in the scheme.

For those borrowers in danger of losing their home who are ineligible for the MTR scheme but qualify for social housing support, it is recommended that they engage as early as possible with their local authority regarding their housing needs. A household may be determined by their housing authority to be in need of housing if it has a mortgage that is deemed to be unsustainable under the Mortgage Arrears Resolution Process (MARP), even though the household may, at that time, remain the legal owner(s) of the dwelling concerned. Any household assessed as eligible for social housing support is immediately eligible for 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.

My Department does not hold data on the number of households whose homes have been repossessed or the potential cost to the Exchequer of supporting these households. My Department does publish a range of housing statistics on social housing delivery mechanisms. This data is available on my Department's website at the following link: <https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision>.

Nitrates Usage

1328. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the cap on the amount of nitrates used by farmers will be increased (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36346/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):

The European Union (Good Agricultural Practice for Protection of Waters) Regulations 2017, as amended, give legal effect in Ireland to the Nitrates Directive and to our Nitrates Action Programme (NAP). Under these Regulations, annual maximum limits are provided for nitrogen and phosphorus for grassland and tillage crops. The rates are designed to meet the crop and soil requirements whilst minimising the risk of losses of nutrients to waters and air. There is no provision under the Regulations for increasing the annual maximum limits for nitrogen.

However, it is acknowledged that the drought this year has impacted significantly on grass growth, causing major difficulties for farmers in the south and east of the country in particular. Accordingly, following consultation with the Minister for Agriculture Food and the Marine, I recently announced that farmers will be allowed as an exceptional measure to spread chemical fertiliser and slurry this year for a fortnight longer than the deadline set out in the Regulations. This offers opportunities for the application of fertilisers later than normally allowed for achieving good grass growth levels through the autumn.

This, along with other important fodder-related measures recently introduced by the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, will help to mitigate the fodder challenges currently facing farmers.

Local Authority Staff Recruitment

1329. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of requests for allowances to hire front-line staff in a local authority (details supplied) for 2017 and to date in 2018; and the number granted and refused respectively in tabular form. [36416/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):

Under section 159 of the Local Government Act 2001, it is the Chief Executive of the Council who is responsible for staffing and organisational arrangements necessary for carrying out the functions of the local authority.

I have delegated authority to the Cork City Chief Executive to fill vacancies that arise within the context of agreed workforce planning numbers without recourse to my Department. Outside of these agreed numbers, an application must be made to my Department for sanction approval for additional staff. Since 1 January 2017, my Department has received 42 staff sanction requests from Cork City Council for additional staff and all 42 requests have been approved. Further details on these requests are set out in the attached table.

My Department works closely with Cork City Council and is in regular contact with the relevant staff in the Council to ensure staffing needs are addressed in an efficient manner.

2017		
Title of Post	Number	Status
Senior Engineer	1	Approved
Senior Executive Librarian	1	Approved
Senior Executive Librarian	1	Approved
Staff Officer Library	1	Approved
Senior Executive Engineer	1	Approved
Assistant Civil Defence Officer	1	Approved

2017		
Title of Post	Number	Status
Senior Executive Engineer	1	Approved
Senior Engineer	1	Approved
Third Fire Officer	1	Approved
Second Fire Officer	1	Approved
2018		
Title of Post	Number	Status
Assistant Engineer	1	Approved
Administrative Officer	1	Approved
Executive Architect - As- signed Certifier	1	Approved
Assistant Architect	2	Approved
Executive Architect	2	Approved
Senior Executive Engineer	1	Approved
Directorate Support	6	Approved
Team Leader - Transition Directorate	2	Approved
Administrative Support - Transition Directorate	1	Approved
Team Member - Transition Directorate	2	Approved
SEO Housing Capital & Construction	1	Approved
Clerical Officer Capital & Regeneration	1	Approved
Assistant Engineer Housing Capital & Regeneration	1	Approved
Clerical Officer Rent Arrear, Housing, Community	4	Approved
Housing Officer Grade 5 Housing & Community	1	Approved
SEO Head of Business Ser- vices	1	Approved
Head of Human Resources	1	Approved
Project Liaison Officer Grade 6 Housing Capital	1	Approved
Executive Engineer Housing Capital & Regeneration	2	Approved

Solar Energy Guidelines

1330. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when guidelines as to the suitable locations for the construction of solar panels will issue. [36764/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Proposals for individual solar farm developments are subject to the statutory requirements of

the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, in the same manner as other proposed developments, with planning applications made to the relevant local planning authority with a right of appeal to An Bord Pleanála. There are currently no specific planning guidelines in place in respect of solar farms.

Under the Act, each planning authority's development plan must set out an overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of the area concerned. Section 10 of the Act requires a development plan to include, inter alia, objectives for the provision or facilitation of the provision of infrastructure, including energy facilities, and many local authorities have developed renewable energy strategies for their areas in this context.

In making decisions on planning applications, planning authorities and the Board must consider the proper planning and sustainable development of the area, having regard to the provisions of the local development plan, any submissions or observations received and relevant Ministerial or Government policies, including any relevant guidelines issued by my Department. Planning authorities must then make their own decisions based on the specific merits or otherwise of individual planning applications.

While I am satisfied that the planning code is sufficiently robust to facilitate the assessment of individual planning permission applications for solar farm developments, I am keeping the matter under review, in consultation with my colleague, the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, who leads on renewable energy policy. In this regard, our two Departments are exploring the potential for enhancing national planning guidance on solar energy, taking account of solar energy projects being assessed by planning authorities and the scope for future development of the sector in the context of the ongoing development of renewable energy policy.

On foot of this ongoing engagement between the two Departments, where the need for specific planning guidance for solar farms is identified, my Department will develop such guidance as deemed appropriate.

Seanad Reform

1331. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the Seventh Amendment of the Constitution (Election of Members of Seanad Éireann by Institutions of Higher Education) Act 1979; the reason the Act has never been commenced; if the possibility of doing so prior to the next election to Seanad Éireann will be investigated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36770/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): A Programme for a Partnership Government includes a goal for this Government to pursue the implementation of the Manning Report, formally known as the Report of the Working Group on Seanad Reform. That report makes recommendations to restructure and reform the Seanad, including implementation of the 1979 amendment of the constitution to extend the university franchise at Seanad elections to graduates of other institutions of higher education in the State.

In April 2018, the Taoiseach established an Implementation Group on Seanad Reform to consider the Manning report and to develop specific proposals to legislate for Seanad Reform. The Implementation Group comprises Members of the Oireachtas with the assistance of outside experts, as appropriate. The Group held its first meeting on 9 May 2018 and is to report back by end October 2018, with the text of a Bill.

The implementation of the 1979 amendment is to be further considered in the context of the work of the Implementation Group. I await the outcome of that group's deliberations as regards the extension of the university franchise.

Commercial Rates

1332. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the business rates legislative proposals published since the Government took office; and the proposals that have been enacted to date. [36919/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): The Local Government (Rates) Bill 2018 was published by the Government on 9 August 2018. Given that the current legislative basis for the levying and collection of rates is spread over a number of enactments, some dating back to the 19th century, the Bill contains proposals for some modernisation and consolidation of the legislation governing commercial rates. Included in the provisions are:

- the removal of the requirement for ratepayers to pay their annual bill in two instalments (moieties) and allow ratepayers to pay rates by instalments or a payment plan agreed with the local authority;
- schemes for the abatement of rates on vacant properties;
- power for local authorities to introduce rates waiver schemes to support local and national policy objectives;
- the levying of interest on unpaid and overdue rates; and
- unpaid rates to be a charge on relevant property.

I intend to seek time in the forthcoming Oireachtas session to have the Bill proceed through the Oireachtas as efficiently as possible.

Local Authority Funding

1333. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the allocation to each local authority for estate management functions in 2017 and 2018. [35416/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): My Department does not allocate specific funding for estate management purposes as this is a matter for each individual local authority.

Local authorities receive income from a variety of sources, including grants from Central Government, Local Property Tax, commercial rates and other locally-raised charges. Each authority is mandated to determine its own spending priorities, while having regard to locally identified needs and available resources.

Local Authority Funding

1334. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Gov-

ernment the amount allocated to each local authority for rental property inspections in 2017 and 2018; and the projected increase in funding for this purpose for 2019, 2020 and 2021. [35418/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Strategy for the Rental Sector, published in December 2016, set out a series of measures to be introduced to ensure the quality of private rental accommodation by strengthening the applicable standards and improving the inspection and enforcement systems.

On 1 July 2017, updated regulatory standards, the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2017, came into effect. These Regulations focus on tenant safety and include new measures covering heating appliances, carbon monoxide and window safety. In August, my Department published a guidance document to assist and support local authorities in implementing the new Regulations.

All landlords have a legal obligation to ensure that their rented properties comply with these regulations and responsibility for the enforcement of the Regulations rests with the relevant local authority, previously supported by a dedicated stream of funding provided from a portion of the proceeds of tenancy registration fees, collected by the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB).

Since establishment of the RTB, over €36 million has been paid to local authorities to assist them in the performance of their functions under the Housing Acts, including the inspection of rented accommodation. Over 207,000 inspections were carried out during this period.

The Rental Strategy recognises the need for additional resources to be provided to local authorities to aid increased inspections of properties and ensure greater compliance with the Regulations. Provision has been made for an additional €2.5 million funding in 2018, with the intention of providing further increases each year in the period to 2021 to facilitate a targeted inspection coverage of 25% of rental properties annually.

The Department offers a subvention to local authorities to carry out inspection of properties under the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations with funding dispersed on the basis of €100 per inspection carried out and €50 per follow-up inspection that achieves compliance. Funding is currently provided to Local Authorities annually in arrears, so no payments have been made in respect of inspections conducted in 2018.

A breakdown of the number of inspections carried out and payments made to each Local Authority in 2017 is provided below:

COUNTY COUNCILS	Inspections Carried Out 2017	Total Payment 2017
Carlow	346	€ 33,700
Cavan	522	€ 51,400
Clare	553	€ 52,450
Cork County	1213	€ 116,800
Donegal	918	€ 90,650
Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown	554	€ 50,700
Fingal	811	€ 75,750
Galway	1120	€ 105,200
Kerry	758	€ 71,650
Kildare	446	€ 43,050
Kilkenny	901	€ 86,200

Laois	166	€ 15,950
Leitrim	112	€ 10,800
Limerick	1052	€ 103,800
Longford	72	€ 7,200
Louth	281	€27,450
Mayo	195	€ 16,000
Meath	361	€ 33,700
Monaghan	330	€ 33,000
Offaly	125	€ 12,200
Roscommon	299	€ 26,500
Sligo	317	€ 29,650
South Dublin	1553	€ 140,850
Tipperary	685	€64,450
Waterford	989	€91,250
Westmeath	874	€81,850
Wexford	400	€38,050
Wicklow	502	€50,200
CITY COUNCILS	Inspections Carried Out 2017	Total Payment 2017
Cork	833	€ 80,250
Dublin	2137	€187,050
Galway	220	€ 21,550
TOTALS	19,645	€ 1,849,300

Student Accommodation

1335. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the protections in place to ensure that accommodation designed and built for students remains as student accommodation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35466/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): Research undertaken by the Higher Education Authority into student accommodation provision estimates that there is significant unmet demand nationally and, with the student population forecast to increase to nearly 193,000 by 2024, significant investment is needed in provision of accommodation nationally. The Department of Education and Skills, with the support of my Department, has sought to increase the provision of new purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) as a key priority in addressing the housing crisis.

In July 2016, my Department provided advice to planning authorities, by way of Circular Letter PL8/2016, regarding matters to consider in relation to proposals for student accommodation. It was made clear that housing for students is a specific and important segment of the overall housing sector with distinct characteristics and requirements. The deficit in student accommodation was highlighted as having a significant related impact on the private rental sector. The increase in the provision of student accommodation was identified as an objective in the Circular and local authorities were encouraged to adopt a positive approach to new PBSA proposals.

In the consideration of PBSA proposals, local authorities were reminded of the need to establish a steady rental income for such student accommodation developments throughout the

year in order to ensure the deliverability of development projects from a funding point of view and to recognise that student accommodation complexes can play an important role in providing affordable accommodation for tourists and visitors in major urban areas during peak summer demand periods.

At the same time, safeguards are required to ensure that student accommodation is not used as permanent residential accommodation and is restricted to students during the academic year. Planning authorities were therefore directed to attach planning conditions to new permissions related to use/occupation of student accommodation which generally facilitated the use of student accommodation complexes as alternative summer or holiday accommodation but reserved as student housing during the academic year.

Such legally binding planning conditions are now generally attached by the local authorities and An Bord Pleanála to new planning permissions for student accommodation. This clarification has assisted in increasing the financial viability of student accommodation through ensuring occupancy of facilities over the entire calendar year. Any breach of the use condition can be investigated by the planning authority under Part VIII of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).

Any subsequent proposed change or deviation to another use would require a new and separate planning permission, and would be assessed by the planning authority in the normal fashion, having regard to the overall development plan policy and other considerations pertaining as to the acceptability of alternative use for the development.

Traveller Accommodation

1336. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the terms of the caravan loan scheme will be reviewed with a view to updating the legislation to make the scheme more accessible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35479/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): In 2016, my Department commissioned the Housing Agency to conduct a comprehensive review of the scheme of loans and grants for caravans that had been in operation since 2000. The Housing Agency surveyed all local authorities and engaged in broad consultation with all key stakeholders. A report on the review was submitted to my Department in 2017.

On foot of the review, I requested that my Department consult with the National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee and other relevant stakeholders to develop a revised scheme having regard to the recommendations contained in the review. This consultation is ongoing and the outcome will support the development of a revised scheme.

Local Authority Staff Data

1337. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of indoor and outdoor staff employed by each local authority in County Tipperary prior to the local authority amalgamation; the number of such staff as of 1 January 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35548/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department oversees workforce planning for the local government sector, including the

monitoring of local government sector employment levels. To this end, my Department gathers quarterly data on staff numbers in local authorities; however, the data gathered does not provide details in terms of the number of indoor and outdoor staff employed by each local authority. Accordingly, the information requested is not available in my Department, but may be obtained directly from Tipperary County Council.

High-level staffing numbers for the local authority sector are available on the Public Service Numbers Databank which is hosted and maintained by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and is available at the following link: <http://databank.per.gov.ie/>, providing access to information from 1980 onwards.

Development Contributions

1338. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if new guidelines regarding development contributions will be issued to all local authorities outlining that purpose built housing or alterations to housing to cater for persons with disabilities should be exempt from development contributions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35560/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Development contributions are levied by local authorities on the basis of a development contribution scheme that is adopted by the elected members of the relevant local authority. The level of contribution and the types of development to which development contributions will apply, including any waivers or reductions from charging in specific circumstances, are therefore determined at local authority level and in accordance with the powers vested in elected members in this regard.

My role as Minister is to provide the necessary statutory and policy framework within which individual development contribution schemes are adopted by each local authority. Existing guidance to local authorities in this regard, originally outlined in Circular PD5-2007 of 9 May 2007, recommends that local authorities provide for a reduced, or waived, fee in respect of development qualifying for a disabled persons grant. The guidance further encourages local authorities to apply exemptions in respect of voluntary housing schemes and other community infrastructural projects delivered via voluntary or not-for-profit non-statutory groups, which may include the development of housing and other facilities for disabled persons. These recommendations are being applied by authorities in their development contribution schemes through a range of exemptions and reduced fees.

In light of the above, I do not propose to issue any further guidelines on this matter.

Emergency Accommodation Provision

1339. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will issue a circular to all local authorities instructing them to provide free access to council sports and leisure services for persons placed in emergency accommodation in their administrative areas. [35633/18]

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.

Rebuilding Ireland includes the objective that hotels will only be used in limited circumstances as emergency accommodation for families. It is recognised that hotel accommodation is inappropriate for accommodating homeless families for anything other than a short period of time. To meet this objective, in addition to providing for long-term housing needs, housing authorities have been pursuing the delivery of a range of additional and enhanced family-focused facilities, or family hubs, which offer a greater degree of stability than is possible in hotels and B&B accommodation, while move-on options to long-term independent living are identified and secured.

My Department is working closely with the local authorities on the development of further family hubs and the provision of appropriate supports to families experiencing homelessness. Access to sports and leisure services is a matter that can be most appropriately considered at local level.

Housing Data

1340. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of pensioners in HAP and-or RAS tenancies in each of the years 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018; the type of tenancy involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35634/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department does not hold the data requested in relation to the number of pensioners in Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) tenancies or Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) tenancies.

The number of tenancies supported under RAS for the period 2016 to end Q1 2018, broken down by local authority area, is available on my Department's website at the following link under the Rental Accommodation Scheme heading - <https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision>.

The number of tenancies supported under HAP for the period 2014 to 2017, broken down by local authority area, is available on my Department's website at the following link under the Housing Assistance Payment heading - <https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision>.

Residential Tenancies Board

1341. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the case of persons (details supplied) will be reviewed; if a decision will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35700/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) was established as an independent statutory body under the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 to operate a national tenancy registration system and to resolve disputes between landlords and tenants.

Due to the quasi-judicial role of the RTB, it would be inappropriate for me as Minister or my Department to comment on, or to interfere in, the specifics of any case.

Complaints directly relating to the quality of the service provided by the RTB should be

made in writing (email, fax or letter) to the Quality Customer Service Officer. Full details of the RTB's complaints procedure is outlined in their Customer Charter and is available to download from their website at: https://onestopshop.rtb.ie/images/uploads/general/RTB_Customer_Charter_2017.pdf.

Emergency Accommodation Data

1342. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of children in emergency housing accommodation by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35726/18]

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 related services for homeless persons rests with individual housing authorities.

Monthly homelessness data reports are produced by housing authorities using the Pathway Accommodation & Support System (PASS), the single integrated national data information system on State-funded emergency accommodation arrangements overseen by housing authorities. My Department collates this information into monthly national homeless reports, which are available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/other/homelessness-data>.

While these monthly reports include a breakdown of adults based on accommodation type at county level, details in relation to dependents (typically children but may include dependent adults) are not available on a county level in my Department and are a matter for the relevant housing authorities. The number of dependents in emergency accommodation in each region in July is provided below:

Area	Number
Dublin	2894
Mid-East (Kildare, Meath, Wicklow)	129
Midlands (Laois, Longford, Offaly, Westmeath)	83
Mid-West (Clare, Limerick)	176
North-East (Louth, Monaghan, Cavan)	43
North-West (Donegal, Leitrim, Sligo)	7
South-East (Carlow, Kilkenny, Tipperary, Waterford, Wexford)	71
South-West (Cork, Kerry)	255
West (Galway, Mayo, Roscommon)	208
Total	3867

Local Authority Housing

1343. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason for the delay in announcing funding for phase 2 of a project (details supplied) in view of the fact that phase 1 will be near completion in September 2018. [35732/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Phase 1 of Dolphin House Regeneration is approaching completion, with the provision of 100 new units. This phase consists of a mix of new build units and units located within retrofitted existing blocks.

I understand that Phase 2 of Dolphin House Regeneration is currently under review by Dublin City Council and it is envisaged that a decision on the Phase 2 strategy will be finalised shortly. When this is completed and indicative costs are known, the City Council will make a formal application to my Department for Stage 1 approval in principle.

Housing for People with Disabilities Provision

1344. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on the recommendation by an organisation (details supplied) that wheelchair accessible housing be made more available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35765/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department is in regular contact with disability advocates in relation to the housing issues of people with disabilities. I met with the organisation referred to last year on the issue of wheelchair accessible housing and further meetings with my Department have taken place since then.

One of the key measures achieved in 2016 under the National Housing Strategy for People with a Disability (NHSPWD), which has been extended to 2020, was the establishment of Housing and Disability Steering Groups (HDSGs) in all housing authority areas, to achieve a coordinated and integrated approach to meeting the housing needs of people with a disability at local level. These are chaired by Directors of Housing in each authority and include HSE and disability representative organisations. Each HDSG has prepared a local Strategic Plan for its own City/County area, to develop specific local strategies to meet identified and emerging need over the next five years. These Plans, along with the annual Summary of Social Housing Assessments, allow local authorities to plan more strategically for the housing needs of people with a disability and support the delivery of accommodation using all appropriate housing supply mechanisms. This is a more targeted and responsive way to meet actual need identified rather than designating a specific percentage or number of new social housing builds that are fully wheelchair accessible although some authorities may choose to allocate a percentage if they choose.

New buildings and extensions or material alterations to existing buildings must comply with the legal minimum performance standards set out in the Building Regulations 1997 - 2017. In this context, the Building Regulations (Part M Amendment) Regulations 2010, and the accompanying Technical Guidance Document M – Access and Use (2010), which came into effect on 1 January 2012, set out the minimum statutory requirements that a building must achieve in respect of access. The TGDs are available on my Department's website at <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/building-standards/tgd-part-d-materials-and-workmanship/technical-guidance-documents>.

The requirements of Part M aim to ensure that regardless of age, size or disability:

- new buildings other than dwellings are accessible and usable;
- extensions to existing buildings other than dwellings are, where practicable, accessible and useable;

- material alterations to existing buildings other than dwellings increase the accessibility and usability of existing buildings, where practicable;

- certain changes of use to existing buildings other than dwellings increase the accessibility and usability of existing buildings where practicable; and

- new dwellings are visitable.

Part M of the Building Regulations aims to foster an inclusive approach to the design and construction of the built environment. While the Part M requirements may be regarded as a statutory minimum level of provision, the accompanying technical guidance encourages building owners and designers to have regard to the design philosophy of universal design and to consider making additional provisions, where practicable and appropriate.

Guidance on how to design, build and manage buildings and spaces so that they can be readily accessed and used by everyone, regardless of age, size, ability or disability, is available in 'Building for Everyone, A Universal Design Approach', a National Disability Authority (NDA) publication, which may be accessed at www.nda.ie.

House Purchase Schemes

1345. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of an application for a mortgage through the Rebuilding Ireland programme by persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35821/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Applications for the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan are not processed by my Department.

All applications are decided on by the local authority that applicants apply to. The Housing Agency provides a central assessment service for local authorities and makes recommendations to the authorities in respect of each application. However, the final decision on loan approval is a matter for each local authority and its credit committee to make on a case-by-case basis.

Decisions on all housing loan applications must be made in accordance with the statutory credit policy that underpins the scheme, in order to ensure consistency of treatment for all applicants. Loan applicants who are dissatisfied with a loan application decision of a local authority credit committee may appeal that decision to the local authority. Details of the appeals process can be obtained from the relevant local authority.

Section 63(3) of the Local Government Act 2001 provides that, subject to law, a local authority is independent in the performance of its functions. Section 6 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 specifically provides that the Minister's power to issue policy directions and guidelines to housing authorities in relation to their housing functions should not be construed as enabling the Minister to exercise any power or control in relation to any individual case with which a housing authority is or may be concerned. Therefore, I am precluded from intervening in relation to individual cases.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

1346. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the target date for the commencement of an affordable housing scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35830/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I commenced the relevant provisions of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, to place the new scheme for affordable purchase on a statutory footing, on 18 June 2018. This Scheme will be delivered by local authorities developing their sites in key locations. The Scheme complements other Government Schemes which help first-time buyers to buy a home, such as the Help to Buy Scheme and the new Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan.

In addition, it is important that cost rental homes become a major part of our rental landscape in the future to fill a gap between social housing and the rental market, making a sustainable impact on housing affordability, national competitiveness, and the attractiveness of our main urban centres as places to live and work. A number of pilot cost rental schemes are being advanced at Enniskerry Road, in Dun Laoghaire Rathdown and at St. Michael's Estate in Inchicore, Dublin 8. Once these have progressed satisfactorily, I plan to roll out cost rental across other suitable sites.

Furthermore, in order to support local authorities to get their sites ready for affordable housing, I am providing substantial Exchequer funding of €75 million for enabling infrastructure via the Serviced Sites Fund. 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 in June, with a closing date of 31st August. The bids received from local authorities under this first call are now being assessed and I expect to make initial funding awards early next month.

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.

Rental Accommodation Scheme Data

1347. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the spend on the rental accommodation scheme; the number of persons in receipt of the scheme, by county, in each of the years from 2015 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35887/18]

1349. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of persons moved from local authority housing waiting lists onto the rental accommodation scheme, by county, in each of the years from 2015 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35890/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1347 and 1349 together.

The Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) introduced in 2005 placed responsibility on local authorities to meet the accommodation needs of people in receipt of Rent Supplement for 18 months or longer, and who are assessed as having a long-term housing need. RAS has provided a more structured, accommodation-based approach to the use of the private rented sector to meet long-term housing need, thereby eliminating dependence on temporary income support payments, i.e. rent supplement. Section 19 of the Housing Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2009 defines RAS as a social housing support.

The assessment of applications for social housing support, and management of the lists of qualified households, is the responsibility of the relevant local authority in accordance with the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 and associated regulations. In the context of the assessment of individual applicants for social housing support, it is a matter for the local authority to determine the housing solution that best meets the needs of the applicant, while taking into account the resources and type of housing available to the authority. 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 RAS scheme, to determine the most appropriate form of support for that household.

In the period since RAS commenced in 2005 to the end of March 2018, local authorities had transferred a total of 60,821 households from Rent Supplement to RAS and other social housing options. Of this number, 34,652 were housed directly under RAS. Based on the 2017 Summary of Social Housing Assessments (SSHA), the Department has set a figure of an additional 600 households nationally to transfer from Rent Supplement to RAS supported tenancies during 2018.

Data on transfers from Rent Supplement to RAS for 2015, broken down by individual local authority, is set out in the following table. Data for 2016, 2017 and Q1 2018, broken down by individual local authority, is available on my Department's website at the following link: <https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision>.

Data for the years 2015 to 2017 on the number and cost of tenancies funded under the RAS scheme, broken down by local authority, is also available at this link. As of 31 March 2018, there are 19,522 tenancies supported under RAS, details of which, broken down by local authority, are set out in the attached table. Expenditure on these tenancies during the period January to March 2018 was €13.78m. I have provided €134.3 million in Budget 2018 to support the cost of RAS and this funding will go towards supporting 600 additional RAS tenancies in 2018 and the ongoing cost of supporting continuing RAS contracts in place at the end of 2017.

RAS remains a significant part of the suite of social housing options available to local authorities and to those who are assessed as being in need of housing support. With the introduction of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) to all local authority areas, the availability of Rent Supplement has changed and is generally no longer available to households with a long-term housing need. This change reduces significantly the numbers of households entering rent supplement support. Equally, as the transfers of existing rent supplement recipients with a housing need to HAP accelerates, the numbers of long term rent supplement recipients eligible for RAS will decline as will RAS transfers.

Tabular Statements

Local Authority	2018 Q1	
	Outturn	Tenancies
Carlow Co. Cl.	€1,005,441.07	529
Cavan Co. Cl.	€23,750.00	559
Clare Co. Cl.	€20,966.22	376
Cork City Cl.	€71,656.14	835
Cork County Cl.	€1,463,372.43	897
Donegal Co. Cl.	€283,732.32	543
Dublin City Cl.	€80,900.00	1,904
Dublin South Co. Cl.	€329,152.64	530

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Dun/Rathdown Co.Cl.	€611,141.00	692
Fingal Co. Cl.	€238,271.07	440
Galway City Cl.	€372,480.13	343
Galway Co. Cl.	€1,506,178.10	921
Kerry Co. Cl.	€744,735.40	659
Kildare Co. Cl.	€49,337.34	913
Kilkenny Co. Cl.	€69,161.20	228
Laois Co. Cl.	€64,007.22	111
Leitrim Co. Cl.	€959,626.25	1,098
Limerick City and Co. Cl.	€0.00	208
Longford Co. Cl.	€0.00	123
Louth Co. Cl.	€289,745.03	851
Mayo Co. Cl.	€946,281.42	437
Meath Co. Cl.	€368,271.89	213
Monaghan Co. Cl.	€101,416.77	135
Offaly Co. Cl.	€32,271.00	420
Roscommon Co.Cl.	€372,073.22	558
Sligo Co. Cl.	€48,550.00	1,393
Tipperary Co. Cl.	€1,580,987.52	1,152
Waterford City and Co. Cl.	€429,693.24	711
Westmeath Co. Cl.	€603,829.83	613
Wexford Co. Cl.	€37,027.51	684
Wicklow Co. Cl.	€1,073,297.69	446
Totals	€13,777,353.65	19,522

Transfers from Rent Supplement to RAS in 2015					
Local Au- thority	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total RAS (to end of 2015)
Carlow County Council	14	9	6	14	43
Cavan Coun- ty Council	19	7	24	17	67
Clare County Council	13	6	11	12	42
Cork City Council	8	19	34	46	107
Cork County Council	11	3	4	4	22
DLR County Council	11	13	11	4	39
Donegal County Council	9	35	22	52	118

Transfers from Rent Supplement to RAS in 2015					
Local Authority	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total RAS (to end of 2015)
Dublin City Council	84	28	23	36	171
Fingal County Council	4	3	4	6	17
Galway City Council	14	18	21	30	83
Galway County Council	2	5	5	3	15
Kerry County Council	20	21	17	22	80
Kildare County Council	28	36	34	47	145
Kilkenny County Council	18	22	48	32	120
Laois County Council	21	28	20	29	98
Leitrim County Council	4	0	0	0	4
Limerick City and County Co	0	2	6	19	27
Longford County Council	2	3	6	19	30
Louth County Council	5	41	4	13	63
Mayo County Council	0	0	2	1	3
Meath County Council	12	8	7	10	37
Monaghan County Council	7	12	15	13	47
Offaly County Council	0	0	0	0	0
Roscommon County Council	0	0	4	1	5
Sligo County Council	22	16	14	14	66

Transfers from Rent Supplement to RAS in 2015					
Local Authority	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total RAS (to end of 2015)
Sth Dublin County Council	7	11	19	22	59
Tipperary County Council	27	19	28	21	95
Waterford City and County Council	0	0	3	14	17
Westmeath County Council	21	44	35	30	130
Wexford County Council	4	8	9	13	34
Wicklow County Council	13	23	6	10	52
TOTALS	400	440	442	554	1,836

Housing Assistance Payment Data

1348. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the spend on the housing assistance payment scheme; the number of persons in receipt of the scheme, by county, in each of the years from 2015 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35889/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme is funded through a combination of Exchequer monies and tenant differential rents collected in respect of HAP tenancies. Budget 2018 has increased the Exchequer funding for the HAP scheme to €301 million. This will allow for the continued support of existing HAP households and also enable the additional 17,000 households targeted under Rebuilding Ireland to be supported by HAP in 2018.

In relation to the Deputy's query regarding the amount spent on, and the number of households in receipt of, the Housing Assistance Payment on an annual basis, the relevant details are set out in the following table.

Year	Additional Households supported at end of year	Expenditure €M
2015	5,680	15.64
2016	12,075	57.69
2017	17,916	152.69

At the end of Q2 2018, there were 37,751 active tenancies being supported by the HAP scheme in the 31 local authority areas. A breakdown of the number of households supported by

HAP, in each local authority area from when the scheme began in 2014 to Q1 2018, is available on my Department's website at the following link:

<https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision>.

Limerick City and County Council provides a HAP transactional shared service on behalf of all local authorities. This HAP Shared Services Centre (SSC) manages all HAP related rental transactions for the tenant, local authority and landlord. Accordingly, my Department does not recoup individual local authorities in respect of HAP rental payments in their administrative areas but rather recoups all landlord costs via the HAP SSC.

I am satisfied with how the HAP scheme is currently operating and I consider it to be a key vehicle for meeting housing need and fulfilling the ambitious programme under Rebuilding Ireland. My Department will, of course, continue to keep the operation of the HAP scheme under review.

Question No. 1349 answered with Question No. 1347.

Ministerial Meetings

1350. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he or his departmental officials have met with a company (details supplied); the number of times he has met with it; the dates of those meetings; the persons from his Department who were present at those meetings; the issues discussed at each meeting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35905/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I met with representatives of this Company on one occasion, on 13 July 2017, to have a general discussion regarding accelerating the provision of housing, particularly mixed tenure/affordable housing, including rental housing. One of my Special Advisers also attended the meeting.

My Department's records are being checked in relation to any meetings that may have taken place at official level and a reply in this regard will be forwarded to the Deputy in accordance with Standing Orders.

Ministerial Meetings

1351. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he or his departmental officials have met with a company (details supplied); the number of times he has met with the company; the dates of those meetings; the person from his Department present at those meetings; the issues discussed at each meeting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35906/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): There is no record of any meetings held between this Company and either myself or my Department officials.

Residential Tenancies Board Enforcement

1352. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will consider proposals to place an obligation on landlords to pre-register a property with the Residential Tenancies Board, RTB, prior to conducting viewings in order to make it more difficult for landlords to evade RTB registration once a tenancy has commenced. [35910/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Residential Tenancies Acts 2004-2016 set out the rights and obligations of landlords and tenants in both the private rental sector and the Approved Housing Bodies (AHB) sector. The Acts provide that landlords in the sector must apply to register a tenancy of a dwelling with the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) within one month of the commencement of the tenancy.

The RTB was established as an independent statutory body under the Acts to operate a national tenancy registration system and to resolve disputes between landlords and tenants.

The statutory obligation to register a tenancy applies irrespective of the existence of a family relationship between the parties to the tenancy agreement. The RTB actively pursues landlords for non-registration. Failure of a landlord to register a tenancy with the RTB can result in criminal conviction. If convicted, a landlord faces fines of up to €4,000 and/or six months' imprisonment, along with a daily fine of €250 for a continuing offence. In addition, if the tenancy is not registered, the landlord cannot avail of the dispute resolution services of the RTB should an issue arise with the tenancy.

To pursue non-compliant landlords, the RTB receives information on residential rented dwellings from several sources. Where non-compliance is identified, notice and warning letters are sent to the landlord. If the landlord still fails to register, enforcement action is taken through the courts.

The RTB is planning to move towards annual registration of tenancies, which will permit the building of a national rent dataset. This enhanced data will be key to understanding trends and behaviour in the rental market as well as informing future policy decisions. While the RTB is continuously seeking to strengthen its registration function, there are no plans at this time to oblige landlords to register properties before the start of a tenancy.

House Purchase Schemes

1353. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the definition of a first-time buyer for a separated person in relation to the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme further to clarification requested by Laois County Council (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35932/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Regulations, under which the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan is established, provide that the loan is available to first-time buyers only. The Regulations define a first-time buyer as having the same meaning as a first-time buyer in Section 92B of the Stamp Duties Consolidation Act 1999, which defines a first-time buyer as a person who has not individually or jointly with another person previously purchased a house or an apartment.

With regard to the correspondence referred to by the Deputy, my Department has responded to the Local Authority concerned in order to clarify the matter. The issue in question concerned the treatment of applicants for the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan who have been divorced or separated. Prior to the launch of the scheme, my Department issued a detailed circular, a statutory credit policy, and frequently asked questions documentation to local authorities. The documentation includes details regarding the treatment of separated or divorced persons for the

purposes of the scheme.

The scheme provides for, under limited circumstances, the means whereby applicants who are separated or divorced may be treated as first-time buyers, in accordance with the regulations. They must meet certain conditions as set out in Section 92B of the 1999 Act, including that:

- they are legally separated or divorced under a court order or by a separation agreement or have been granted an annulment by a court;
 - the property being purchased is the first property since leaving the family home;
 - they have left the family home and retain no interest in it;
 - they have made no financial gain from the transfer of the ownership of the family home;
- and
- the other party has remained in the family home.

The loans under this scheme are provided by the local authorities and the applications are assessed by the Housing Agency on their behalf. Each local authority must have in place a credit committee which makes the final decision on applications for loans, in accordance with the regulations and having regard to the recommendations made by the Housing Agency.

Electoral Reform

1354. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to introduce legislation to extend gender quotas to local elections in time for the 2019 elections; if work is being undertaken on the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35989/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): A provision of the Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012 links the State funding of political parties in the Electoral Acts to the achievement of a gender balance in candidate selection for Dáil general elections. To receive full State funding under the Electoral Acts, a qualified political party had to have at least 30% women candidates and at least 30% men candidates at the election. This will rise to 40% in 2023. The provision came into effect for the February 2016 general election.

State funding under the Electoral Acts is not provided to qualified political parties on the basis of local electoral performance. However, it is envisaged that the gender balance provisions of the Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012 at national level will have important knock-on effects at local level resulting in greater gender balance among candidates for the local elections in 2019.

In line with a commitment in the National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020 to investigate potential supports to promote the participation of women in the 2019 local government elections, my Department, having consulted with key stakeholders, will in the coming weeks submit a report setting out a range of possible practical initiatives which could be taken to meet the commitment of the National Strategy for the 2019 local elections and beyond.

Electoral Reform

1355. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to increase gender quota percentages for general elections; if work is being undertaken on the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35990/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): Part 6 of the Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012 (which amends Part III of the Electoral Act 1997) provides that, in order to receive full State funding under the Electoral Acts, a qualified political party must have at least 30% women candidates and at least 30% men candidates at a general election. This came into effect for the first time at the general election of February 2016.

The 2012 Act also provides that the general election held next after the expiration of seven years from that 2016 general election will see the 30% gender provisions rise to 40% i.e. the 40% gender provisions will apply at any general election taking place from 2023 onwards.

Local Authority Staff

1356. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the work being undertaken to professionalise the provision of housing services in local authorities through specialist university level training in the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35991/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): As Minister, I am primarily responsible for the formulation and implementation of policy and for the preparation of legislation in relation to housing nationally.

Section 63(3) of the Local Government Act 2001 provides that, subject to law, a local authority is independent in the performance of its functions. The day-to-day operation of the social housing system including the issue of ensuring that all staff have the necessary skills and expertise required to perform their roles to the highest professional level possible is in the first instance, a matter for the relevant local authority concerned.

However, mindful of the need to have the best trained staff possible working in the housing area, my Department supports the development of appropriate third level training. To this end, my Department has actively engaged with the Institute of Public Administration (IPA), who have a strong and valued reputation in providing quality third level education particularly to staff in the public sector, to ensure that the right mix of courses are available for local authority and other staff who work in the housing area. The Institute already runs a number of such courses every year, including a year-long Certificate in Housing Studies programme, which I understand is very well availed of by local authority staff across the country.

Vacant Properties

1357. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to introduce a grant to renovate old one-off housing in rural Ireland (details supplied) to assist with the housing shortage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36028/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Pillar 5 of the Government's Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness is specifically focused on utilising existing housing stock, with a key objective of ensuring that

houses throughout the country and across all forms of tenure, in both the public and private sectors, is used to the optimum degree possible. An overarching action within that Pillar is a commitment to develop a National Vacant Housing Reuse Strategy. This Strategy, published in July 2018, strives to provide a targeted, effective and co-ordinated approach to identifying and tackling vacancy across Ireland and contains a range of objectives and key actions which will be pursued in partnership with stakeholders and agencies across the housing sector to address vacancy in our housing stock.

Capital funding is provided to local authorities to acquire a range of properties for social housing use. The properties involved can range from those in good condition to those that need remediation and may have been vacant. To ensure a local-led response to such work, responsibility for property acquisitions is delegated to local authorities. To further assist local authorities pursuing vacant properties, funding is available through the Buy & Renew Scheme to facilitate local authorities in acquiring and remediating vacant properties that may be suitable for social housing. As with standard acquisitions, local authorities have delegated responsibility to utilise the Buy and Renew Scheme, as part of the blend of property acquisitions, as appropriate to their area, given housing need and the availability of properties of different types.

The Repair and Leasing Scheme (RLS) has been developed under Pillar 5 to assist private property owners and local authorities or Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) to harness the accommodation potential that exists in certain vacant properties across Ireland. The scheme is targeted at owners of vacant properties who cannot afford or access the funding needed to bring their properties up to the required standard for rental property. Subject to the suitability of the property for social housing, and the agreement of the property owner, the cost of the necessary repairs will be met upfront by the relevant local authority or an Approved Housing Body (AHB). As part of the agreement, the property owner then leases the dwelling to the local authority for use as social housing for a length that is linked to the value of the repairs but subject to a minimum of 5 years. The value of the repairs is offset incrementally against the agreed rental payment over a defined period within the lease. The RLS is available in all local authorities, in both rural and urban areas. However, it is a condition of the scheme that the property is an area with a social housing need and fulfils social housing demand.

Property owners may also qualify for schemes such as the Home Renovation Incentive (HRI) and the Better Energy Homes Scheme. The HRI enables owners to claim tax relief on repairs, renovations or improvement works that are carried out on their main home or rental property. Information on this scheme is available from the Revenue Commissioners or at www.revenue.ie. The Better Energy Homes Scheme is administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority Ireland (SEAI) to help homeowners and landlords reduce their energy costs and emissions by providing grants towards insulation, heating control and solar thermal improvements on homes occupied and built before 2006. Further details on grant payments and qualifying works are available from the SEAI website at www.seai.ie.

Tenant Purchase Scheme Review

1358. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to reopen the tenant purchase scheme. [36066/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme which came into operation on 1 January 2016 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 hous-

ing support for at least one year.

In line with the commitment given in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, a review of the first 12 months of the Tenant Purchase scheme's operation has been undertaken. The review has incorporated analysis of comprehensive data received from local authorities regarding the operation of the scheme during 2016 and a wide-ranging public consultation process which 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.

House Purchase Schemes

1359. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if persons are considered to satisfy the eligibility criteria relating to employment for the Rebuilding Ireland home loan in circumstances in which the primary applicant is in continuous employment for more than two years and the secondary applicant is in continuous employment for more than one year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36076/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan is targeted at first-time buyers who wish to own their own home, have access to an adequate deposit and have the capacity to repay a mortgage, but who are unable to access a mortgage sufficient for them to purchase their first home. As with the previous local authority loan offerings, the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan is available to first-time buyers only. This is to ensure the effective targeting of limited resources.

As part of the eligibility requirements, the primary earner on the application must have at least two years' continuous employment (this can be self-employment) and the second applicant must have continuous employment for at least one year.

Full details of the loan's eligibility criteria and other information is available from the dedicated Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan website - <http://rebuildingirelandhomeloan.ie/>.

Social and Affordable Housing Maintenance

1360. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the steps taken by his Department in response to the European Committee of Social Rights finding in 2017 that Ireland was in violation of Article 16 of the Revised Social Charter in respect of social housing (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36083/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In January 2018, the Government acknowledged the findings of the European Committee on Social Rights in respect of social housing conditions under Article 16 of the Revised Social Charter on Social Rights and my Department is committed to improving social housing conditions through a range of measures, including returning vacant units to productive use and energy efficiency programmes.

It should be noted that the management and maintenance of local authority housing stock and

carrying out of responsive repairs and pre-letting repairs is a matter for each individual local authority under Section 58 of the Housing Act 1966. However, Rebuilding Ireland committed all local authorities to adopt a preventative maintenance approach to housing stock management, including consistent standards and the adoption of a common national re-letting performance standard. To further this aim, the City and County Management Association (CCMA) has re-established a committee to look at the planned maintenance issue and there is on-going dialogue between the CCMA and my Department in order to advance reform in the area.

The first phase of the regeneration of Dolphin House, Dublin 8, a local authority estate cited in the findings, is nearing completion. This phase consists of the deep retrofitting of three of the existing housing blocks to provide 63 refurbished apartments and 37 new build units comprised of 28 apartments and 9 houses to give an overall total of 100 new and refurbished units. The retrofitting includes externally insulating the walls of the existing blocks to improve their thermal efficiency and the provision of lifts to make all units accessible. Outdoor spaces will be landscaped and play areas provided within the courtyard areas. Work on site is nearing completion and it is expected that residents will begin to move into the finished units shortly. Work is already underway designing Phase 2 of the regeneration project. Once the full regeneration is complete, the Dolphin House community will be rehoused in comfortable, retrofitted or new build accommodation and additional units will have been created for new residents.

The regeneration of St Teresa's Gardens, Donore Avenue, Dublin 8 – another local authority estate cited in the findings – is also underway. Enabling works, demolitions and de-canting has been completed and has paved the way for Phase 1 of the project, which will result in the provision of 54 new homes, comprising 16 apartments and 38 terraced houses. Two of the existing blocks have been retained in the medium term to provide temporary accommodation pending completion of the new build units. These have been consolidated and refurbished to provide some 57 units of temporary accommodation, and will ultimately be demolished following completion of the new build units.

Energy Efficiency

1361. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if an allocation under phase 11 of the energy efficiency programme will be made to Longford County Council in order to carry out necessary works to local authority dwellings. [36116/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Energy Efficiency Retrofitting Programme, which commenced in 2013 to improve the energy efficiency and comfort levels in local authority homes, is being implemented in a number of phases. Funding of some €115.7 million has been provided from 2013 to the end of 2017 to improve almost 64,000 local authority homes, benefitting those at risk of fuel poverty and making a significant contribution to Ireland's carbon emissions reduction targets and energy reduction targets for 2020.

Phase 1 of the Programme focused on providing attic/roof insulation and the less intrusive cavity wall insulation and is expected to be completed this year. Phase 2 will focus on the external fabric upgrade of those social housing units with solid/hollow block wall construction and has been successfully piloted by Westmeath and Fingal County Councils.

Phase 2 of the Programme attracts co-funding at a rate of 50% under the European Regional Development Fund 2014 – 2020 and therefore must be implemented in accordance with all relevant EU regulations in addition to the management and control procedures as required by the

Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. Requests for Phase 2 funding, including that from Longford County Council, will be considered once the technical aspects of the scheme are finalised. Local authorities will be notified accordingly at that stage.

Water and Sewerage Schemes Funding

1362. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the rate of subsidy paid to group water schemes will be increased in view of the fact that the subsidies paid to group water schemes do not cover the full maintenance costs of the schemes and in some cases there is a shortfall of between 25% and 35% annually; if the cost of the shortfall could be met at the end of 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36182/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In late 2017, my Department conducted a review of Group Water Scheme subsidies. The review involved discussions with the National Federation of Group Water Schemes, the representative body of the Group Water Sector. Discussions concluded in December 2017, when I approved increased subsidy levels. The new subsidy arrangements, endorsed by a special delegate conference of the Federation on 13 December 2017, came into effect on 1 January 2018. Local authorities were advised of the increased subsidy levels on 19 December 2017.

The changes implement the recommendation contained in the report of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Future Funding of Domestic Water Services (JOCFFDWS), endorsed by both Houses of the Oireachtas in April 2017, that there should be equity of treatment and equivalent financial support between households using public water services and those availing of private water services.

Additionally the Multi-annual Rural Water Programme provides capital funding opportunities for Group Water Schemes to, if suitably located, interconnect to and be taken in charge by Irish Water (Measure 4 of the multi-annual programme), or amalgamate with nearby Group Water Schemes forming a new larger entity that is more effective, including in their day-to-day running costs, through economies of scale (Measure 1 of the multi-annual programme).

Measure 3 of the multi-annual programme provides capital funding for schemes to undertake water conservation works to reduce their wastage of water, through carrying out where necessary, replacement of defective water mains thus enabling schemes to reduce their day-to-day running costs.

Separate to the initial review of Group Water Scheme subsidy levels and also in fulfilment of the JOCFFDWS recommendations, in April 2018, I established a Working Group to conduct a wider review of investment needs and rural water services. There will be a two-strand approach to the considerations of the Working Group. Strand 1 will consider the composition and distribution of funding for the Multi-annual Rural Water Programme from 2019 up to 2021, while Strand 2 will consider the more complex longer-focus issues surrounding the long-term future resourcing of the Rural Water Sector.

In order to put the review process on the best footing, I have established a significantly increased funding base for the Rural Water Programme. This increase is reflected in the National Development Plan where investment in the Programme is set to rise by €5m or 25% in 2019, and this enhanced level of investment will be maintained for the three year cycle up to 2021.

Housing Estates

1363. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the preparation and finalisation of a national protocol with regard to the taking in charge of estates served by developer-provided infrastructure, such as waste water tank and shores, will be finalised in order that local authorities can proceed to take these estates in charge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36202/18]

1410. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when he plans to invite proposals for the forthcoming national taking in charge scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36799/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1363 and 1410 together.

My Department launched the National Taking-in-Charge Initiative (NTICI) in April 2016 to trial new approaches and working methods in supporting and accelerating overall national and local action on the taking-in-charge process of housing estates, including estates with developer-provided water services infrastructure (DPI). Under the terms of the NTICI, which was underpinned by €10 million in funding, developments subject to valid taking-in-charge applications were eligible for inclusion in the associated call for funding proposals. Ultimately, €7.7 million of the allocated funding was paid to local authorities in respect of 330 developments, containing some 13,400 homes.

Findings and recommendations from the NTICI process will be included in a report on the initiative that I intend to publish shortly. The publication of the NTICI report will be of value to local authorities and other stakeholders in applying the lessons from the pilot authorities, in a more general roll-out of a streamlined approach to taking-in-charge. I expect that the initiative will contribute to further streamlining of the taking-in-charge process, through, for example, securing coordination with capital works by Irish Water.

In addition, the National Development Plan includes provision of €31 million for the period 2018-2021 for DPI. This is clear evidence of the Government's commitment to transition from the pilot phase under NTICI to a programme phase, commencing with an estimates provision of €3 million in 2018.

Expert Panel on Concrete Blocks

1364. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the amendments to the mica report following from consultation submissions will be adopted; when the NSAI report will be ratified and made public; when a clear methodology will be available on the way in which affected homes can be repaired or replaced; if a redress scheme as part of budget 2019 will be considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36211/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The Expert Panel on concrete blocks was established by my Department in 2016, to investigate problems that have emerged in the concrete blockwork of certain dwellings in Counties Donegal and Mayo.

The Panel had the following terms of reference:

- (i) To identify, insofar as it is possible, the numbers of private dwellings which appear to be

affected by defects in the blockwork in the Counties of Donegal and Mayo;

(ii) To carry out a desktop study, which would include a consultation process with affected homeowners, public representatives, local authorities, product manufacturers, building professionals, testing laboratories, industry stakeholders and other relevant parties, to establish the nature of the problem in the affected dwellings;

(iii) To outline a range of technical options for remediation and the means by which those technical options could be applied; and

(iv) To submit a report within six months.

On 13 June 2017, the report of the *Expert Panel* was published and included eight recommendations which my Department is actively progressing with the relevant stakeholders, prioritising the implementation of Recommendations 1 and 2.

With regard to Recommendation 1, the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) Technical Committee, established to scope and fast track the development of a standardised protocol, held its inaugural meeting on 11 September 2017 and has held several further meetings since. The standardised protocol will inform the course of action in relation to remedial works for all affected householders. The draft standard was published on 6 June 2018 for public consultation and ran for a period of six weeks to 18 July 2018. The Technical Committee are currently in the process of considering the submissions received with a view to publishing the standardised protocol shortly.

The draft standard, I.S. 465 - Assessment, testing and categorisation of damaged buildings incorporating concrete blocks containing certain deleterious materials, outlines a protocol which will be used to assess and categorise the damage in properties where the concrete blocks are suspected to contain the minerals mica or pyrite. Previously, there was no common way for engineers or homeowners to assess the damage caused by defective concrete blocks to help decide what, if any, remedial work could be carried out.

This standard:

With regard to Recommendation 2, my Department has been in contact with Engineers Ireland in relation to the establishment of a register of competent engineers for homeowners/affected parties' reference. Engineers Ireland has provided assurance that they will collaborate with the Department, the NSAI and others on measures to establish such a register once the standardised protocol is in place.

Last year, I visited Donegal and Mayo and met with key stakeholders, including affected homeowners, elected members and officials of the local authorities and other interested parties. On 18 December 2017, I again visited Donegal and met with key stakeholders to provide an update on the progress to date. I made a similar visit to Mayo on 26 January 2018 and again to Donegal on 13 July 2018.

Once the standardised protocol is in place, I will be in a position to provide a further update on progress at that time.

In addition, I am currently considering what further actions may be required to assist the parties directly involved in reaching a satisfactory resolution to the problems that have emerged in the two counties.

1365. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the progress that has been made in the establishment of the planning regulator, the recruitment of staff and securing of office space; the timeline for the opening and commencement of operations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36213/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Planning & Development (Amendment) Act 2018 was signed into law by the President on 19 July 2018. One of the key elements of the Act is the legal base it provides for the establishment of the Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR).

My Department is advancing the work necessary to allow me to establish the Office as soon as possible. An Advance OPR Establishment team has been created within my Department to drive the necessary work for the corporate establishment of the OPR and the appointment of the Regulator. In that regard, the team have been progressing the recruitment competition and I expect the Public Appointments Service to advertise the position of the Planning Regulator later this month. In addition, interim premises have been secured for the OPR on Sir John Rogerson's Quay in Dublin, pending the making of long-term leasing arrangements.

It is intended to add additional staffing supports to the advance team over the coming months to facilitate the smooth transition of work from my Department to the OPR and to finalise the work of corporate establishment. Once the Regulator is recruited and in place, I will then be in a position to formally establish the Office and to second a small team of staff to the Office to ensure that the core functions can be fulfilled from its inception. I expect that the Regulator will then begin recruiting the rest of the staff required to fulfil its statutory mandate.

I look forward to the appointment of the Planning Regulator and the full establishment of the Office as an important measure to help promote and safeguard the quality and integrity of the planning process.

Child Care Services

1366. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if community childcare facilities are exempt from rates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36235/18]

1367. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to exempt all childcare facilities from liability for rates in view of their role in the provision of preschool education; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36236/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1366 and 1367 together.

The Commissioner of Valuation is independent in the performance of his functions under the Valuation Acts and the making of valuations for rating purposes is solely his responsibility. As Minister, I have no function in relation to decisions in this regard.

The Valuation Act 2001, as amended by the Valuation (Amendment) Act 2015, provides that all buildings used or developed for any purpose, including constructions affixed thereto, are rateable unless expressly exempted under Schedule 4 of the Act. In general, the Act maintains the long-standing position that all commercial properties - including all private childcare facilities such as play schools, pre-schools, crèches and Montessori schools - are liable for rates.

Schedule 4 of the Valuation Act 2001 lists properties that are exempt from rating purposes.

Schedule 4 was amended by the Valuation (Amendment) Act 2015 by inserting an exemption from rates for properties occupied by parties that provide early childhood care and education on a not-for-profit basis. This extension of the childcare and education exemption removed an anomaly that previously existed where parties that provided childcare and education on a charitable basis were exempt but those that did so on a not-for-profit basis were not.

In addition to the exemption of parties that provide childcare and early education on a not-for-profit basis, paragraph 10 of Schedule 4 to the Valuation Acts 2001 to 2015 also exempts from rates childcare facilities that exclusively provide the Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme.

The Acts are quite specific about the range of exemptions that can be allowed by the Commissioner, who has no discretionary latitude to grant exemptions not covered by Schedule 4. As a matter of course, the Valuation Office examines all claimant cases on their individual merits by reference to the relevant statutory provisions governing the operation of the Valuation Acts as they relate to pre-school childcare facilities and all other categories of properties.

Home Loan Scheme

1368. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of mortgage applications by local authority for the Rebuilding Ireland home loan; the number of loans issued; the average mortgage amount; the amount drawn down to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36253/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): As with the previous local authority home loan offerings, loan applications under the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan are made directly to the local authority in whose area the property proposed for purchase is situated. My Department does not directly collect information on the number of loan applications received by each local authority.

However, as is currently the case, my Department will continue to publish information on the overall number and value of (i) local authority loan approvals and (ii) local authority loan drawdowns. Information up to Q4 2017 is available on the Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/house-prices-loans-and-profile-borrowers/local-authority-loan-activity>, and this information will be updated on a quarterly basis as additional data is compiled.

In addition, the Housing Agency provides a central support service which assesses loan applications that are made to the local authorities and makes recommendations to the authorities as to whether loans should be offered to applicants. I have asked the Agency to centrally compile figures on the numbers of applications that it has assessed and the most recent figures, as at the end of August, indicate that the Agency had received a total of 2,628 applications for assessment from local authorities. The table below provides information on the geographical distribution of applications received centrally by them for assessment since the scheme began:

Region	Feb-Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Total
Cork, Galway, Kildare, Louth, Meath and Wicklow	359	182	193	131	126	991

Dublin	407	214	161	115	91	988
Other	230	107	110	111	91	649
Total	996	503	464	357	308	2,628

Of the 2,628 applications received, 2,074 were deemed to be valid. Of these valid applications, 1,989 had been assessed and 1,024 of these (51%) had been recommended for approval. A breakdown by local authority of the 1,024 applications recommended for approval is set out in the table below.

Local Authority	Approved Applications
Dublin City Council	149
Fingal County Council	138
Meath County Council	91
Cork County Council	89
South Dublin County Council	79
Kildare County Council	60
Wicklow County Council	41
Cork City Council	35
Wexford County Council	30
Galway County Council	30
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council	28
Laois County Council	26
Kerry County Council	25
Limerick City & County Council	24
Galway City Council	22
Louth County Council	19
Tipperary County Council	16
Sligo County Council	15
Carlow County Council	13
Clare County Council	13
Longford County Council	12
Donegal County Council	12
Roscommon County Council	11
Mayo County Council	10
Westmeath County	10
Kilkenny County Council	9
Waterford City & County Council	8
Offaly County Council	6
Cavan County Council	1
Monaghan County Council	1
Leitrim County Council	1
Total	1024

The average loan amount across the 1,989 applications underwritten was €160,038.

Each local authority must have in place a credit committee and it is a matter for the committee to make the decision on applications for loans, in accordance with the regulations, having regard to the recommendations made by the Housing Agency.

Social and Affordable Housing Applications Data

1369. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of social housing units built or acquired in Rush, County Dublin, in each of the years 2015 to 2017, inclusive, and to date in 2018. [36254/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Rebuilding Ireland is focused on accelerating the delivery of housing, with an investment of more than €6 billion to deliver 50,000 social housing units through build, refurbishment, acquisition and leasing, over the period to 2021.

A high level of progress is already being made in meeting Rebuilding Ireland's targets. Over 19,000 households had their social housing need met in 2016 through all delivery streams, while for 2017, the output has increased to almost 26,000. At the end of Q1 2018, some 6,100 additional housing solutions had been provided across all local authorities in addition to 930 construction schemes in place delivering over 14,000 homes. Details of the 930 schemes, including those in the Fingal County Council area, are contained in the Construction Status Report for Q1 2018, which is available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following link:

<http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-social-housing-construction-status-report-q1-2018/>.

This Report for Q1 2018 shows a significant level of activity being undertaken by Fingal County Council, in conjunction with Approved Housing Bodies, with 34 projects at various stages of progress, which will deliver in the region of 760 homes by 2020. My Department and the Council continue to engage actively and meet regularly to oversee progress on the implementation and delivery of projects.

As a housing authority, Fingal County Council is responsible for the identification of the social housing need in their area and for the development of appropriate responses to meet this need. The Council also acquires properties to address specific needs and, accordingly, has acquired 16 units in Rush since 2015. It is open to the Council to submit further proposals for housing in this area.

Detailed data in relation to social housing delivery by each local authority, for the years 2015 to end Q1 2018, is available on my Department's website at:

<https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordble/overall-social-housing-provision>.

Home Loan Scheme

1370. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the case of a person (details supplied) will be examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36278/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Section 63(3) of the Local Government Act 2001 provides that, subject to law, a local authority is independent in the performance of its functions. Section 6 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 specifically provides that the Minister's power to issue policy directions and guidelines to housing authorities in relation to their housing functions should not be construed as enabling the Minister to exercise any power or control in relation to any individual case with which a housing authority is or may be concerned. Therefore, I am precluded from

intervening in relation to individual cases.

Appeals for the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan are not dealt with by my Department. A decision on loan approval is a matter for each local authority and its credit committee to decide on a case-by-case basis. Decisions on all housing loan applications must be made in accordance with the statutory credit policy that underpins the scheme, in order to ensure consistency of treatment for all applicants. Under the policy, each local authority must establish an appeal mechanism for cases where applicants are not satisfied with the decision regarding their application. All appeals must be sent into the local authority that applicants applied to. Details of the appeals process can be obtained from the relevant local authority. The person concerned should therefore contact the local authority to which the loan application was made for an update in relation to the appeal.

Home Loan Scheme

1371. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the length of time applications for the Rebuilding Ireland home loan are taking to be processed by each county council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36280/18]

1372. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the way in which decisions are made in respect of the Rebuilding Ireland home loan. [36281/18]

1373. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the appeal process in respect of decisions from the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36285/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1371 to 1373, inclusive, together.

The new Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan is designed to enable credit-worthy first-time buyers to access sustainable mortgage lending to purchase new or second-hand properties in a suitable price range. The scheme is targeted at first-time buyers who have access to an adequate deposit and have the capacity to repay a mortgage, but who are unable to access a mortgage sufficient for them to purchase their first home.

The Housing Agency assesses applications for loans on behalf of the local authorities. However, the final decision on loan approval is a matter for each local authority and its Credit Committee on a case-by-case basis. Decisions on all housing loan applications must be made in accordance with the Regulations establishing the scheme and the statutory credit policy issued under the Regulations and have regard to the recommendations of the Housing Agency in order to ensure consistency of treatment for all applicants.

Loan applicants who are dissatisfied with a loan application decision of a local authority Credit Committee may appeal that decision to the local authority. Details of the appeals process can be obtained from the relevant local authority.

I requested the Housing Agency to compile monthly statistical reports on the numbers of applications that it receives centrally from local authorities. These include the average length of time taken by the Agency to assess applications before returning them to the relevant local authority, which as of the end of August stands at 10 calendar days. Each local authority must undertake additional administration and processing of each application, including meeting with the applicant and allowing the Credit Committee to make their final decision, and the time taken

for this additional work can vary across each local authority.

Credit Union Services

1374. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of work with the credit unions and the approved housing bodies on the establishment of a special purpose vehicle to facilitate the delivery of social housing. [36299/18]

1422. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the special purpose vehicle research project for the investment of credit union funds in social housing will be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36881/18]

1428. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the progress being made in establishing a financial vehicle for credit unions to invest in social housing, as promised under Rebuilding Ireland; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that credit unions will only be permitted to invest in such a financial vehicle that is regulated by the Central Bank; if his officials have consulted with the Central Bank on this; if the funding vehicle will be regulated by the Central Bank; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36959/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1374, 1422 and 1428 together.

Work has been ongoing between the Irish Council for Social Housing (ICSH), a number of larger Tier 3 AHBs and their financial advisors on the development of a vehicle for delivering private financing for AHBs providing social housing in line with commitments under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness. This project involved a number of phases, including engagement with a range of financial institutions. Part of this also involved the AHBs examining models that will facilitate private financing with regard to the recent reclassification of Tier 3 AHBs. It is anticipated this work will be completed shortly.

Following engagement with the credit union sector on proposals for credit unions to provide funding for the provision of social housing, the Central Bank undertook a review of the investment framework for credit unions in 2017. On foot of this review, revised Regulations commenced on 1 March 2018. The revised Regulations included the addition of investment in “regulated investment vehicles where the underlying investments of the regulated investment vehicle are investments in Tier 3 Approved Housing Bodies” as a permitted investment class for credit unions. As such, since March 2018, credit unions are permitted to provide funding, through a regulated investment vehicle, to Tier 3 AHBs for the provision of social housing. In respect of the development of specific SPVs by the credit unions to enable them to make investments in the sector, it is a matter for the credit unions themselves to make the necessary arrangements.

Approved Housing Bodies

1375. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the reclassification of approved housing bodies; and the work being undertaken to remove approved housing bodies from the balance sheet. [36301/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):

As the Deputy will be aware, last April, the Minister for Finance published the Draft Stability Programme Update for 2018. This included an analysis of the financial impact of the Eurostat decision to reclassify the majority of Tier 3 Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) as part of the local government sector. This was an important first step in the Government's assessment as to the impact of the Eurostat decision. The Department of Finance is now undertaking an analysis of the implications for General Government Expenditure and General Government Debt up to 2021. My Department continues to engage with the Department of Finance in relation to this work.

Following the completion of the initial analysis, which has defined the scope of the financial implications of this decision for the Exchequer, my Department also held discussions with the Departments of Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform to ensure that AHBs can continue to fulfil their full potential in the delivery of the targets set out in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness.

My Department is also engaging with the AHB sector and has had constructive discussions with representative bodies from the sector on the issue. The sector itself has engaged its own research on the matter and my Department is evaluating that research, as part of its ongoing consideration of the issue. I understand that the AHB representative bodies have indicated that they intend to submit further proposals to my Department concerning possible suggested ways forward. All proposals by the AHB sector and other relevant bodies will be evaluated and considered as part of this process as soon as they are submitted.

I remain fully committed to continuing to work with the AHB sector to assess the options available to create the necessary conditions to allow this classification decision to be revisited in the future.

As previously noted, the Government continues to see a central role for the voluntary housing sector in contributing to delivery of social housing under Rebuilding Ireland. It is committed to using all mechanisms and schemes, including through the AHB sector, to ensure that we maintain the momentum towards meeting the ambitious 50,000 social housing target under the Action Plan.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

1376. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the actions he has taken on foot of the review of delivery costs and viability for affordable residential developments. [36314/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under the Government's Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan, my Department committed to undertaking a detailed analysis, in conjunction with the construction sector, of housing delivery input costs in Ireland.

To advance this work, a working group, chaired by my Department, was established to review the delivery costs and viability for affordable residential developments in the domestic market. The group analysed each of the main input costs (land, construction, professional fees, development levies, finance & development margins and VAT). In parallel, the Housing Agency carried out a separate comparative analysis of international construction costs.

The initial findings of the Department's review identified the viability of urban apartment schemes at affordable price levels was extremely challenging. To resolve the current housing shortage, as well as to plan more effectively for our future under Project Ireland 2040, under

which more compact growth such as apartments are urgently needed in our urban centres, I established a working group to undertake a focused review of the 2015 Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments – Guidelines for Planning Authorities to explore how to improve the viability of apartment development in our cities and towns, with a cost analysis also carried out. The revised guidelines were published in March 2018 and are available at the following link:

<https://www.housing.gov.ie/planning/guidelines/apartments/design-standards-new-apartments-guidelines-planning-authorities-march>.

To further support the delivery of apartments, I published draft Urban Development and Building Heights Guidelines for Planning Authorities last month for public consultation. These guidelines set out new and updated national planning policy on building heights in relation to urban areas, elaborating on the strategic policy framework set out in Project Ireland 2040 and the National Planning Framework, and are part of a suite of integrated measures and policy shifts to break the current patterns and development trends for our cities and towns and create more compact and integrated communities. The closing date for submissions is Monday, 24 September 2018.

In summary, my Department published three separate cost reports:

- *Review of Delivery Costs and Viability for Affordable Residential Developments;*
- *Cost analysis of the updated “Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments, Guidelines for Planning Authorities”;* and

- *Comparison of Residential Construction Costs in Ireland to other European Countries,*

on 12 April 2018, which are available on my Department’s website at the following link:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/rebuilding-ireland/construction/minister-eoghan-murphy-publishes-analyses-cost-delivering>.

Each of these reports is important in terms of analysing key elements of delivery in our housing sector as well as providing robust responses. Viability in affordable home building is essential as the sector recovers and the Government continues to implement solutions in this area.

As Minister, I have been clear that we need to address housing affordability, recognising the pressures that exist for low- to middle-income households, particularly in Dublin and certain other of our main urban centres. The delivery of targeted affordable housing, for purchase and rent, was a priority topic at the third Housing Summit which I held with Local Authority Chief Executives in July. It also featured prominently at the post-Housing Summit meeting with Local Authority Housing Directors of Service.

Affordability measures to support the provision of more affordable homes include the commencement of a new statutory scheme for affordable purchase which will be complementary to other Government Schemes which help first-time buyers to buy homes, such as the Help to Buy Scheme and the new Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan. Furthermore, a number of cost rental pilot projects are being developed by local authorities in Dublin, in cooperation with the Housing Agency, Approved Housing Bodies and the European Investment Bank, to provide homes to rent at below market rates, with the intention to roll out the concept across other suitable sites in urban areas. In addition, Exchequer funding of €75 million is being provided under the Serviced Sites Fund to help to offset the costs of providing both on-site and off-site enabling infrastructure for sites in order for them to be brought into use for affordable housing. The call

for proposals has recently closed and I expect to award an initial tranche of funding next month.

Finally, the imminent establishment of the new Land Development Agency to assist in ensuring a more effective approach to strategic land management, particularly in terms of publicly owned land with a particular emphasis on complex regeneration projects and the provision of affordable housing, and the creation by my colleague the Minister for Finance of the new Home Building Finance Ireland (HBFI) initiative, which will provide finance at commercially competitive rates to developers with sites ready-to-go but who are experiencing difficulty in obtaining funding, will also contribute to the increased supply of new homes including homes at more affordable price levels to buy and rent.

Construction Industry

1377. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the financial or other incentives that exist for the construction and delivery of commercial development. [36316/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The construction and delivery of commercial development is a matter for normal market functioning within the broad legislative, regulatory and policy context set down by Government and local authorities in the areas of planning, building regulations and related areas. I am not aware of any incentives that exist for the construction and delivery of commercial development. The issue of financial incentives, such as tax incentives, are a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Finance.

Carer's Allowance Payments

1378. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the policy of not allowing carer's allowance to be taken into account as earned income for the purposes of the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme will be reviewed on the grounds that carers are effectively working full-time caring for their family members. [36330/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): As the Deputy is aware, the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan is not, as a general rule, available to those in receipt of unemployment or other social welfare benefits. However, where there is a primary income of a waged or salaried nature, long-term State benefit payments may be considered. State benefit payments allowable are:

- State Pension (Contributory);
- State pension (Non-Contributory);
- Widow's/Widower's Pension;
- Blind Pension;
- Invalidity Pension; and
- Disability Allowance.

The long-term nature of the payment must be confirmed by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. All applications are dealt with on a case-by-case basis and are

referred to the relevant local authority's Credit Committee for a final decision.

As Carer's Allowance does not fall within this category of long-term payment, I have no plans to alter the conditions of the scheme in the manner outlined by the Deputy.

Housing Agency Data

1379. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the acquisition of vacant homes by the Housing Agency using its €70 million fund and other resources available to it; the number of properties offered to the State for purchase from 2016 to 2017 and to date in 2018; the number of offers made by the agency for vacant homes; the number of bids accepted; the number of contracts signed; the number of properties sold on to approved housing bodies; the average cost of these homes; the number of properties that previously had their loans secured by NAMA; and the number of these properties that were previously offered for purchase to local authorities or other State agencies. [36333/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Since the publication of Rebuilding Ireland in mid-2016 to the end of August 2018, the Housing Agency has been offered a total of 3,967 properties from banks, private investment funds and other sources for acquisition, using both the €70 million rotating acquisitions fund and other funds made available to the Agency through Local Authorities. 2,101 of these were offered in 2016 and 2017 and 1,866 have been offered to date in 2018.

In assessing these properties proposed by vendors, the Agency liaised closely with the relevant local authorities to confirm demand and suitability for social housing use. Local authorities confirmed interest in 2,742 of the proposed properties. Following confirmation of interest, vendors withdrew some of the identified properties, due to sales to other parties or for other reasons, leaving a total of 2,163 properties.

The total number of bids submitted by the Agency on available properties was 1,492 and the total number of bids accepted by vendors was 939, with acceptance of a further 97 bids awaiting vendors' decision. 194 properties were withdrawn by vendors after the Agency submitted bids. The bidding process is still ongoing on a number of active portfolios and bids on approximately 60 properties are currently being prepared by the Agency.

The total number of properties for which contracts have been signed at the end of August was 552, with the total number of properties acquired at 529. 181 properties had been sold to Approved Housing Bodies and a further 222 properties were under caretaker lease arrangements with Approved Housing Bodies which allows upgrade works and tenancing to proceed. 17 properties were in the process of being placed under Caretaker Leases. In addition, 109 properties have been transferred directly to local authorities.

The average price of the 529 properties which have been acquired is €184,464 and the average price of the 181 properties sold to Approved Housing Bodies is €216,710. The price of properties sold to Approved Housing Bodies includes the cost of upgrade works required for those properties.

A total of 21 properties have been acquired which had their loans secured by NAMA either at the time of purchase or at a prior time. 19 of these properties were acquired through NAMA and two were acquired separately from an investment fund who had acquired loans from NAMA.

The Agency has bids accepted on a further 21 properties with the investment fund who acquired the associated loans from NAMA. Of the two properties acquired and the 21 properties with bids accepted from the private investment fund which had loans previously secured by NAMA, four were previously offered for social housing by NAMA, but were not considered suitable for social housing at the time of the NAMA loan sale.

Property Registration

1380. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the knowledge his Department has on the profile of the concentration of ownership of land here; the location in which such information is published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36358/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Property Registration Authority records the names and addresses of every registered land owner and details in respect of each county can be accessed at www.landdirect.ie. My Department does not collate or hold specific data regarding profiles on the concentration of ownership of residential, commercial or other categories of land holdings across the entire country.

Given the importance that all State residential land is brought forward for the development of social and affordable housing, the State residential landbank, incorporating lands in the ownership of the Housing Agency and local authorities, has been detailed and mapped and is available at <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/rebuilding-ireland-land-map/>.

Project Ireland 2040 signals a significant policy shift towards securing more compact and sustainable urban and rural development, which requires significantly more effective active land management. Against that background, it is proposed to establish a new Land Development Agency to assist in ensuring a more effective approach to strategic land management, particularly in terms of publicly owned land.

Detailed arrangements in relation to the establishment of the Agency are currently being developed by my Department, in conjunction with the Department of An Taoiseach and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, with a view to their early finalisation later this month.

Housing Issues

1381. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the action he is taking to deal with construction delays associated with Part V approvals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36361/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I am not aware of delays to construction associated with Part V approvals. My Department keeps the January 2017 Guidelines on Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 under review, in consultation with relevant stakeholders, including the Irish Homebuilders Association.

My Department will consult further as to whether any process improvements are required in relation to Part V, so that construction can continue as speedily as possible and any possible delays be avoided.

Rents Data

1382. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of individuals or families that pay rent to a private landlord each month excluding those that benefit from State supports in paying rent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36363/18]

1383. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of households that pay rent to a private landlord each month excluding those that benefit from State supports in paying rent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36364/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1382 and 1383 together.

My Department does not hold or collate the data referred to by the Deputy in relation to rents paid to private residential landlords.

The Clerk of the Dáil requested that arrangements be put in place to facilitate the provision of information by State Bodies to members of the Oireachtas. Following the issue of Circular LG (P)05/16 on 20 September 2016 from my Department, the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) set up a dedicated email address for this purpose. The RTB may be contacted at Oireachtas-MembersQueries@rtb.ie to establish the extent to which it may hold the information sought.

Local Authority Housing Eligibility

1384. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when a review of income limit guidelines for social housing provision will be carried out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36383/18]

1387. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the review of the income limits for social housing support will be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36411/18]

1402. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the income thresholds will be increased for housing applicants to allow greater access to public housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36641/18]

1411. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when he plans to increase the income eligibility limits for social housing in counties Cavan and Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36857/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1384, 1387, 1402 and 1411 together.

The Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011 prescribe maximum net income limits for each local authority, in different bands according to the area, with income being defined and assessed according to a standard Household Means Policy.

The income bands and the authority area assigned to each band were based on an assessment of the income needed to provide for a household's basic needs, plus a comparative analysis of the local rental cost of housing accommodation across the country. It is important to note that the limits introduced at that time also reflected a blanket increase of €5,000 introduced prior to

the new system coming into operation, in order to broaden the base from which social housing tenants are drawn, both promoting sustainable communities and also providing a degree of future-proofing.

As part of the broader social housing reform agenda, a review of income eligibility for social housing supports is underway. The Housing Agency is carrying out the detailed statistical work which will underpin this review on behalf of my Department. That work is now almost complete. The review will obviously have regard to current initiatives being brought forward in terms of affordability and cost rental and will be completed when the impacts of these parallel initiatives have been considered.

Flood Relief Schemes

1385. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if funding is available via local authorities towards covering the cost of damage to private businesses that were uninsured and which were damaged during Storm Eleanor; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36389/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Since the severe flooding of winter 2015/2016 the Irish Red Cross has operated a scheme of assistance for small businesses, sporting bodies and community and voluntary groups who have been unable to obtain insurance against flooding and experienced flood damage to their premises. This scheme is administered by the Irish Red Cross on behalf of the Department of Defence.

In early January 2018, the Government announced the activation of this scheme to provide emergency humanitarian support to small businesses, sporting bodies and community and voluntary groups affected by the flooding arising from Storm Eleanor in the period 2 to 5 January, 2018. The closing date for receipt of applications was 31 January, 2018. A total of €346,285 was paid out to 40 successful applicants under the scheme.

My Department and the local government system have no responsibility for overseeing any scheme of assistance for private businesses affected by flooding.

Departmental Communications

1386. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the arrangements in place in his Department and the organisations under its aegis for lo-call numbers or 1800, 1850 and 1890 phone numbers for members of the public to contact his Department or organisations under its aegis; which of these phone numbers are completely free to call by persons who use mobile phones and who may incur major bills phoning such organisations; if the situation will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36402/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department offers both landline and LoCall numbers for anyone wishing to contact its offices. The rates charged for the use of 1890 (LoCall) numbers is a matter for each service provider and, therefore, the Department has no control over this matter. However, the Department's website does indicate clearly to customers that rates charged may vary among different service providers.

The information requested in relation to organisations under the aegis of my Department

is a matter for the individual bodies concerned. Arrangements have been put in place by each Agency to facilitate the provision of information directly to members of the Oireachtas. The contact email address for each agency is set out in the table.

Agency	Email address
An Bord Pleanála	Oireachtasqueries@pleanala.ie
Ervia, Gas Networks Ireland	oireachtas@ervia.ie
Housing Sustainable Communities Agency	publicreps@housingagency.ie
Housing Finance Agency	oireachtas.enquiries@hfa.ie
Irish Water	oireachtasmembers@water.ie
Local Government Management Agency	corporate@lgma.ie
Ordnance Survey Ireland	Oireachtas@osi.ie
Property Registration Authority	reps@prai.ie
Pyrite Resolution Board	oireachtasinfo@pyriteboard.ie
Residential Tenancies Board	OireachtasMembersQueries@rtb.ie
Valuation Office	oireachtas.enquiries@VALOFF.ie

Question No. 1387 answered with Question No. 1384.

Fire Service Staff

1388. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of fire fighters employed in each county in each of the past three years in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36439/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department gathers quarterly data on fire fighters in local authorities. The most recent data collected at the end of June 2018, together with data from the past three years, are set out in the table attached.

My Department works closely with all local authorities to ensure adequate staffing levels are in place and maintained for emergency services.

-	2015			2016			2017			2018 (end Q2)		
	Full Time	Re-tained	Total	Full Time	Re-tained	Total	Full Time	Re-tained	Total	Full Time	Re-tained	Total
Cork City	136	0	136	136	0	136	136	0	136	136	0	136
Dublin local authorities	842	21	863	898	28	926	920	26	946	919	25	944
Limerick City & County	58	73	131	65	69	134	64	71	135	66	67	133
Waterford City & County	31	93	124	29	87	116	32	89	121	32	87	119
Carlow	1	47	48	1	46	47	1	47	48	1	47	48
Cavan	0	90	90	0	93	93	0	92	92	0	91	91
Clare	1	73	74	1	77	78	0	66	66	1	66	67

Cork	0	211	211	0	209	209	0	202	202	0	207	207
Donegal	0	159	159	0	159	159	0	151	151	0	154	154
Galway	35	113	148	35	111	146	37	114	151	36	113	149
Kerry	3	106	109	3	103	106	2	102	104	3	96	99
Kildare	0	65	65	0	71	71	0	72	72	0	69	69
Kilkenny	0	67	67	0	66	66	0	66	66	0	66	66
Laois	0	69	69	0	70	70	0	65	65	0	65	65
Leitrim	0	48	48	0	46	46	0	47	47	0	47	47
Longford	0	48	48	0	46	46	0	47	47	0	47	47
Louth	53	41	94	54	43	97	54	40	94	54	38	92
Mayo	2	119	121	2	116	118	2	121	123	2	121	123
Meath	1	72	73	1	73	74	1	75	76	1	73	74
Monaghan	0	47	47	0	49	49	0	48	48	0	50	50
Offaly	2	50	52	2	48	50	2	49	51	2	52	54
Roscommon	0	56	56	0	55	55	0	53	53	0	52	52
Sligo	4	43	47	3	43	46	3	43	46	2	42	44
Tipperary	0	130	130	0	124	124	0	129	129	0	128	128
Westmeath	0	48	48	0	45	45	0	49	49	0	49	49
Wexford	1	65	66	1	65	66	1	63	64	1	64	65
Wicklow	0	101	101	0	98	98	0	98	98	0	101	101
	1170	2055	3225	1231	2040	3271	1255	2025	3280	1256	2017	3273

Social and Affordable Housing Expenditure

1389. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the guidelines and rules in place for funding to local authorities in respect of turnkey housing schemes to be provided by the private sector; the maximum percentage a local authority can pay into an escrow account at the commencement of the process; if stage payments can be made during the building process; if the balance of the project is only payable on the completion of the houses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36469/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Given that turnkeys are a good source of social housing that can often be quickly delivered, at value for money prices, local authorities actively utilise turnkeys as one of a range of mechanisms to deliver additional social homes.

Turnkey delivery involves local authorities going to the market to procure a social housing solution to meet an identified social housing need. As is standard with turnkey development, apart from an initial 10% of the purchase cost that my Department will provide to a local authority to cover its deposit costs, the balance of the funding provided by my Department is based on delivery, as homes are completed in a turnkey condition and keys handed over to the local authority.

In many cases, these developments would not go ahead without the certainty of the end purchaser and they are of particular use where the local authority have limited or no lands available for housing in an area.

Irish Water

1390. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local

Government the average connection fee charged by Irish Water for mains and sewerage for each local authority area in 2016, 2017 and 2018 in tabular form. [36493/18]

1391. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason for the large discrepancies in the cost of new water and sewerage connections from one local authority area to another; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that 57 different connection charging regimes exist with over 900 different connection charges due to the fact that each local authority area has its own method for calculating connection charges with different cost structures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36499/18]

1392. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the Commission for Regulation of Utilities plans to publish recommendations regarding Irish Water's plan to charge a flat fee of €5,636 for connection to both water mains and sewerage; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that publication of this report has been delayed twice; if his attention has been further drawn to the discrepancies in charges for connections that exist from one area to another; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36500/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1390 to 1392, inclusive, together.

The Water Services Acts 2007-2017 set out clearly the arrangements in place for the delivery of water and wastewater services by Irish Water, and for the scrutiny and oversight provisions that apply in respect of these arrangements. Responsibility for the independent economic regulation of the water sector is assigned to the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) and the CRU is required to perform its functions in a manner that best serves the interests of customers of Irish Water.

Under the Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013, and since 1 January 2014, Irish Water has been responsible for charging for the cost of connections to the water and wastewater network. The Act of 2013 provides that Irish Water shall collect charges from its customers in receipt of water services provided by it in accordance with a water charges plan, to be approved by the CRU. Section 22(5) of the Act provides that a water charges plan may provide for charges in respect of the provision of services connections to premises.

In line with a direction issued by the CRU, Irish Water currently continues to apply the same connection charges for connecting to the public water and/or wastewater network as were applied by local authorities on 31 December 2013. In practice this means that some 57 different connection charging regimes, with over 900 different connection charges, currently continue to apply as each local authority had its own method for calculating connection charges, with different cost structures and customer classifications and differing approaches to service delivery.

I understand that in 2016 the CRU requested Irish Water to submit a proposal for an enduring Connection Charging Policy for customers seeking a connection to the network. In January 2018, the CRU held a public consultation on the development of the policy for domestic and non-domestic connections to Irish Water's network, known as a National Connection Charging Policy. The Policy will be aimed at developing a more harmonised methodology for connections to the public water and wastewater network.

In an information note published on its website on 2 August 2018, the CRU indicated that the time-line for publishing its proposed decision on Irish Water's proposed National Connection Charging Policy has been extended, while indicating that it now expects to publish its proposed decision in the fourth quarter of 2018. The public will be invited at that stage to comment on any additional information included further to the public consultation process, under-

taken earlier this year, before the CRU makes its final decision in the matter which it anticipates will be made by the end of 2018.

The CRU as regulator is independent in this matter and will come to its own independent assessment of the appropriate Water Connections Charging Policy, having considered the views of interested parties through the public consultation process. As Minister, I must respect the statutory powers and functions which the Oireachtas has conferred on the CRU in this matter.

Details of the average connection fee charged by Irish Water for mains and sewerage for each local authority area in 2016, 2017 and 2018 are an operational matter for which Irish Water has responsibility. It may be helpful in this regard to know that Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. The team can be contacted via email at oireachtasmembers@water.ie or by telephone on a dedicated number, 1890 578 578.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

1393. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the new build housing target that was set for 2017; the way in which this compares to output by housing type; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36509/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The total target for Social Housing delivery in 2017 was to provide 21,050 additional housing solutions across Build, Acquisition, Leasing, HAP and RAS schemes. The total output for 2017 was 25,901, or 123% of the target.

The table sets out delivery by each main delivery programme. Build refers to Local Authority and Approved Housing Body construction, including traditional construction, turnkeys, rapid build delivery, regeneration and homes delivered through the Part V mechanism.

Delivery Method	2017 Targets	2017 Final Output	% of 2017 Target Achieved
Build	2,434	2,297	94%
Voids	766	1,757	229%
Acquisitions	1,250	2,214	177%
Leasing	600	827	137%
RAS	1,000	890	89%
HAP	15,000	17,916	119%
Total	21,050	25,901	123%

Social and Affordable Housing Eligibility

1394. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the way in which the cost rental housing scheme at a location (details supplied) in Dublin 8 will operate; the persons that will be eligible to rent these properties; the amount below market rents they will be rented for; if funding for this project can be considered off balance sheet; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36514/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Emmet Road/St. Michael's Estate site in Inchicore has been selected as the location for Dublin's first major Cost Rental development. It is an excellent site in the ownership of Dublin

City Council that is suited for a mixed tenure approach. Under the Cost Rental model, minimising profit, land costs and other costs and securing very competitive EIB financing mean that much more affordable rents can be achieved than can be delivered through market arrangements. The on/off balance sheet position of the project will be influenced by the final delivery and financing arrangements.

While the final tenure mix will be decided by the Council and informed by the detailed site development process, it will include 140 social housing homes, with the remaining 330 homes predominantly provided under cost rental.

The final rents will be set after all associated costs are determined, following on from the competitive construction and management tender processes, and I expect that the cost rental scheme should be able to deliver rents of between of 15% to 25% below the market rate. The scheme will be aimed at households earning low to moderate incomes at a maximum of €50,000 for single applicants and €75,000 for dual applicants.

Fire Safety Regulations

1395. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the fire safety task force established after the Grenfell Tower fire disaster submitted its report; if he has considered the conclusions and recommendations of same; the necessary actions to be taken on foot of the report to ensure fire safety with regard to high rise developments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36516/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): On 27 June 2017, following the fire in London's Grenfell Tower, and in recognition of concerns arising for fire safety in Ireland, I tasked my Department's National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management with convening and coordinating a high-level task force to lead a re-appraisal of fire safety in Ireland.

In addition to this, and in the immediate aftermath of the Grenfell Tower fire, I instructed local authorities to undertake a review of fire safety in medium-to-high rise buildings fitted with cladding systems. I asked the task force to oversee and report on this initial action, as well as, among other things, reviewing existing arrangements and systems for fire safety and related issues which impact on fire safety in Ireland.

The work of the task force has now been completed and it has provided me with a full report, titled "Fire Safety in Ireland: Report of the Fire Safety Task Force", which describes its work, its conclusions on the state of fire safety in Ireland and its recommendations for moving forward.

I have accepted the task force's recommendations, and its report was brought to Government on 6 June 2018.

With regard to the review of medium-to-high rise buildings, fire authorities were asked to identify buildings in their functional areas of more than six storeys, or more than 18 metres in height. In cases where the buildings identified are fitted with external cladding systems, fire authorities were asked to consider if use of powers under section 18(6) of the Fire Services Acts, 1981 and 2003 – to require the person having control over the building to carry out a fire safety assessment of the premises and provide the assessment to the fire authority – was warranted. The most recent figures provided by fire authorities indicate:

- 842 buildings have been identified, countrywide, at this height,

7 September 2018

- of these, 291 buildings are fitted with cladding systems,

- of these, fire authorities required fire safety assessments in 226 cases – 105 in residential buildings, and 121 in non-residential buildings,

- of these, 108 fire safety assessments have been received by fire authorities,

- of these, fire authorities are proposing further action in respect of fire safety in 19 buildings where fire safety concerns – not in all cases related to external cladding – have been identified.

This fire safety assessment work is on-going, and will be overseen by fire authorities and the National Directorate.

My Department issued guidance in December 2017 dealing with fire safety assessment of medium-to-high rise buildings with cladding systems, and including guidance on fire safety measures to be applied in buildings, pending completion of remedial works to cladding systems, where these are considered necessary.

By identifying a small number of buildings, so far, where remedial works were required, the review process undertaken is seen to have had a positive effect and to have made contributions to both enhancing fire safety in medium-to-high rise buildings, and also raising fire safety awareness among owners/ landlords with statutory fire safety responsibilities.

However, the devastating fire at Grenfell Tower highlights the critical importance of fire safety in buildings, and the need for sustained vigilance in this regard. The Task Force report makes a range of recommendations for improvements to fire safety in buildings, and to provision of fire services in Ireland and I have requested the Management Board of the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management to carry through the recommendations of the report within my direct ambit and to oversee and report on the implementation of other recommendations.

Copies of both the Report and the Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations are available on my Department's website at the following links:

Fire Safety Task Force Report:

http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/fire_safety_in_ireland_-_report_of_the_fire_safety_task_force.pdf

Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations:

http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/fire_safety_in_ireland_-_report_summary_of_conclusions_and_recommendations.pdf

Rental Accommodation Standards

1396. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of inspections carried out in the rental sector in 2017; the number of non-compliant dwellings at first inspection in 2017 for each of the four Dublin local authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36517/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Strategy for the Rental Sector, published in December 2016, set out a series of measures to be introduced to ensure the quality of private rental accommodation by strengthening the ap-

plicable standards and improving the inspection and enforcement systems.

The Rental Strategy recognises the need for additional resources to be provided to local authorities to aid increased inspections of properties and ensure greater compliance with the Regulations. Provision has been made for an additional €2.5 million funding in 2018, with the intention of providing further increases each year in the period to 2021 to facilitate a targeted inspection coverage of 25% of rental properties annually.

Since establishment of the RTB, over €36 million has been paid to local authorities to assist them in the performance of their functions under the Housing Acts, including the inspection of rented accommodation. Over 207,000 inspections were carried out during this period. In 2017, 19,647 inspections were carried out by Local Authorities.

The numbers of non-compliant dwellings at first inspection in 2017 for each of the four Dublin local authorities are as follows;

- Dublin City Council: 1,165,
- Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown: 202,
- Fingal County Council: 559, and
- South Dublin County Council: 1,135.

Homeless Persons Data

1397. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of children and adults deemed homeless in counties Cavan, Monaghan and Louth in each of the past 12 months in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36551/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department publishes a monthly report on homelessness. The monthly report is based on data provided by housing authorities and produced through the Pathway Accommodation & Support System (PASS). The report captures details of individuals utilising State-funded emergency accommodation arrangements that are overseen by housing authorities and can be accessed at the following link:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/other/homelessness-data>.

While these reports identify the number of adults utilising State-funded emergency accommodation at county level, details in relation to dependents (typically children but may include dependent adults) is only available on a regional basis and is set out in the table below.

Numbers in Emergency Accommodation - North East Region

-	Cavan - Adults	Louth - Adults	Monaghan - Adults	North East Region - Dependents
August 2017	2	122	1	48
September 2017	2	137	1	65
October 2017	4	137	2	73
November 2017	3	142	3	85

December 2017	2	139	4	84
January 2018	3	147	5	101
February 2018	4	150	1	155
March 2018	5	54	1	49
April 2018	4	124	0	45
May 2018	5	111	0	55
June 2018	3	125	1	54
July 2018	7	118	2	43

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

1398. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the measures he is taking to increase the stock of social housing by 50,000 by 2021; the immediate measures he is taking to alleviate the plight of the increasing number of families presenting as homeless; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36584/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under Rebuilding Ireland, a total of 50,000 social housing homes will be delivered through build, acquisition and leasing programmes. In addition to this, 87,000 additional households will be supported through the Housing Assistance Payment Scheme (HAP) and the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS).

The combination of 50,000 social housing homes and 87,000 HAP and RAS social housing supports, which are being funded by the Government in the period 2016 to 2021, means that over 137,000 long term and flexible options will be made available to those on housing waiting lists under Rebuilding Ireland.

The Government, working with the local authorities, Approved Housing Bodies and other delivery agents, is already exceeding the delivery targets set for the first two years of Rebuilding Ireland. Of the combined target of 137,000 referred to above, just under 45,000 households have had their housing need met by the end of year 2 of the Rebuilding Ireland Plan – 33% of those targeted under the 6 year Plan as a whole.

In 2017, 25,901 households had their housing need met, with some 7,095 of these properties delivered through the build/acquisition and long-term leasing mechanisms.

The significant expansion of the social housing build programme is evident in the Quarter 1 2018 Social Housing Construction Status Report. The programme includes 930 schemes (or phases) at the end of last year, delivering almost 15,000 homes, a very substantial increase on the 10,072 homes in the programme a year earlier. The full report can be accessed at: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-social-housing-construction-status-report-q1-2018/> .

Data relating to overall social housing delivery in 2017 and Quarter 1 2018, across all local authorities, is published on my Department's website at the following link: <https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision>.

In 2018, I expect to see at least 25,500 households having their housing need met. I have advised all local authorities of their minimum social housing targets across build, acquisition and lease both for 2018 and also for the multi-annual period to 2021, details of which can be accessed on my Department's website at: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-social-housing-delivery-targets-for-local-authorities-2018-2021/>.

Given that the scale and pace of local authority building activity are targeted to continue to increase, additional resources, including technical resources which during the inactive years had been lost to local authorities, continue to be replenished. Streamlined approval processes for capital projects have also been put in place, including a revised single stage approval process for certain projects.

In addition, my Department and I are actively addressing homelessness, working with local authorities to accelerate the delivery of social housing homes for those who need them. While these more permanent housing solutions are being put in place, we are working with local authorities to deliver Family Hubs, which are a first response only, but do provide more suitable, safe and supported family living arrangements, with a greater level of stability than is possible in hotel accommodation, while move-on options to long-term independent tenancies are identified and secured.

There are currently 22 family hubs in operation, 18 of which are in Dublin, two in Limerick, one in Cork and one in Kildare. Combined, these hubs provide over 500 units of family accommodation. My Department is working closely with the local authorities on the development of further family hubs.

Student Accommodation

1399. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the measures he is taking to alleviate the crisis in student accommodation; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the severe shortage in rental accommodation is continuing to push rents upwards and out of the reach of most students that are then left with no choice but to defer their college place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36585/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In July 2016, the Government's Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness identified the under-supply of purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) in Ireland and the significant related adverse impact that this deficit was having on the wider private rental sector. The increased provision of PBSA was established as a key priority in addressing the current wider housing crisis.

My Department works closely with the Department of Education and Skills through the Inter-Departmental Working Group on Student Accommodation in examining the issue of student housing and potential policy measures to increase accommodation supply. This Group which includes stakeholders from the Higher Education Institutes, Union of Students in Ireland and other Government Departments highlighted important issues in developing new student accommodation projects, including the planning and development finance aspects in assembling new development projects.

The work of this Group led directly to the initiation of reforms in the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016 which provided for the fast-tracking of planning applications for student housing construction projects of greater than 200 bed-spaces to An Bord Pleanála (which commenced on 3 July 2017). In addition, the legislation provides for the availability of low-cost financing from the Housing Finance Agency to the Higher Education Institutes specifically for new student accommodation projects in order to support the delivery of new accommodation projects.

My Department has also assisted in the preparation of the National Student Accommodation Strategy which was launched by the Department of Education and Skills in July 2017 – a

specific action committed to under Rebuilding Ireland. This policy document was developed with input from the key stakeholders in the sector and includes eight key targets and 27 actions to support the delivery of an increased supply of purpose-built student accommodation.

These and other measures by my Department have assisted in delivering a significant increase in the level of purpose-built student accommodation projects coming forward nationally.

Recent analysis from the Higher Education Authority has indicated that, by May 2018, approximately 3,000 bedspaces had been delivered since the publication of Rebuilding Ireland and some further 7,250 bedspaces are currently under construction nationally. In addition, over 7,000 bedspaces have received planning permission but are yet to commence construction and a further 1,200 are seeking planning permission. The scale of this level of additional student accommodation should exert a downward pressure on the cost of such accommodation, through availability of supply and competition.

In tandem with measures to increase new accommodation supply, my Department has supported the initiative of the Minister for Finance in increasing the availability of student accommodation in private homes through the “rent a room” provisions whereby a tax exemption for the homeowner of up to €14,000 per year can be availed of.

Since 2016, in conjunction with the Department of Education and Skills, my Department has also provided funding to the Union of Students in Ireland for their ‘Homes for Study’ campaign – this essentially funds a website and activities to match students with rooms in private houses through the following weblink: <http://homes.usi.ie/> .

My Department is therefore very keenly aware of the concerns raised over significant increases in the cost of student accommodation in certain student complexes and will continue to liaise with wider education-sector stakeholders through the Inter-Departmental Working Group on Student Accommodation under the chairship of the Department of Education and Skills. For example, the Group will continue to examine the range of student accommodation types (and ancillary services), available with a view to considering how best to regulate pricing arrangements, including, if appropriate, new regulatory or legislative proposals which might be considered in the context of the forthcoming Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Bill 2018.

Housing Assistance Payment

1400. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the full year cost of the HAP and RAS programmes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36596/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme is funded through a combination of Exchequer monies and tenant differential rents collected in respect of HAP tenancies. The full rollout of HAP in all Local Authorities was completed in March 2017 and, therefore, 2018 will be the first full 12 month calendar year of operation. Budget 2018 provided Exchequer funding of €301 million which will provide ongoing financial support for the existing HAP households for whom tenancies were in place up to end 2017, and the additional 17,000 households targeted under Rebuilding Ireland to be supported by the HAP scheme in 2018.

The Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) places responsibility on local authorities to meet the accommodation needs of people in receipt of Rent Supplement for 18 months or longer, and who are assessed as having a long-term housing need. Data for the years 2011 to 2017

on the number and cost of tenancies funded under the RAS scheme, broken down by local authority, 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>. The number of RAS tenancies in place at the end of 2017 was 19,756 and expenditure on the scheme in 2017 was just under €143m. €134.338m has been allocated to RAS in 2018.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

1401. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of dwellings that have been acquired on long-term leases for social housing in 2017 and to date in 2018; the number of those dwellings that are apartment dwellings; the number that are house dwellings; the length of the long-term leases per unit of all dwellings acquired; if the cost is fixed at time of acquirement or is subject to increase or decreases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36606/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Government has set out an ambitious set of targets for the delivery of social housing in the period to 2021 in its Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan. A commitment to deliver 50,000 new social housing homes through a range of delivery mechanisms is being supported by a multi-annual Exchequer commitment totalling €6.5 billion over the period of the plan. These targets will be achieved using a combination of building, purchasing and leasing high quality properties to meet the needs of households on local authority waiting lists around the country.

Of the 50,000 social housing homes to be delivered under Rebuilding Ireland, 10,000 will be leased by local authorities and approved housing bodies under leasing arrangements from a range of different sources.

Data on social housing leasing, funded by my Department, in respect of all local authorities to end Q1 2018 is published on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision>. Data in respect of Q2 2018 is currently being collated and will be available shortly. Data relating to property type, i.e. apartments/houses, is not collected by my Department.

In general, long-term lease arrangements are for terms of between 10 to 20 years in duration, giving local authorities access to properties on a long term basis and providing certainty and security for tenants. All long term leasing contracts provide for periodic rent reviews. Reviews usually take place every 3 to 4 years, and are adjusted upwards or downwards in line with the rent setting mechanism set out in the lease agreement. In most cases, rent reviews are linked to changes in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) or the Harmonised Index of the Consumer Price Index (HICP).

Question No. 1402 answered with Question No. 1384.

Local Authority Housing Waiting Lists

1403. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of persons on the Kildare County Council housing list in each of the years 2012 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36665/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):

Details on the number of households qualified for social housing support in each housing authority area are provided in the statutory Summary of Social Housing Assessments (SSHA). The most recently published SSHA, carried out in 2017, details the number of households on all local authority waiting lists as at 28 June 2017.

The results of the SSHA are available on my Department's website and include breakdowns by each local authority across a range of categories. The 2017 report also includes the results of the 2016 summary for comparative purpose. Full details in relation to the 2017 assessment are available on my Department's website at the following link:

http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/sha_summary_2017.pdf.

The SSHA for 2018 will be published shortly.

Local Authority Funding

1404. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the balance of funding required to be provided by local authorities in addition to the funding they receive from his Department to bring void council homes back into use; his plans to reduce that contribution; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36683/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Section 58 of the Housing Act 1966, provides that the management and maintenance of local authority housing stock is a matter for each individual local authority. This includes the implementation of planned maintenance programmes and carrying out of responsive repairs and pre-letting repairs.

My Department supports local authorities in bringing vacant properties back to productive use by providing funding under the voids programme. The exchequer funding is additional to the support that local authorities provide themselves towards such work. Under this programme, local authorities can claim a maximum of €30,000 funding per unit and there are no plans to change this limit. The derelicts and 2 into 1 programmes require greater levels of remediation with associated higher costs, in excess of the limits as set out in the voids programme.

Local Authority Housing

1405. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of local authority homes that have been brought back into use by each local authority in each year since the scheme commenced in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36684/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Since the introduction of the Voids Programme in 2014, some 9,227 vacant units were returned to productive use. Details on the number of voids, derelicts and 2 into 1s brought back into use are set out in the following table. The purpose of the voids programme is to ensure that vacant units are actively targeted and returned to productive use as quickly as possible. Without substantial refurbishment under construction contracts, these social homes would have been left vacant and not part of the active social housing stock.

Voids Data 2014 to 2017: incorporating Voids, Derelicts and 2 into 1 Programmes

Questions - Written Answers

Area	Units Returned in 2014	Funding 2014	Units Returned in 2015	Funding 2015	Units Returned in 2016
Carlow	42	€325,111	28	€300,650	8
Cavan	23	€349,137	28	€307,018	32
Clare	65	€995,831	96	€1,472,533	79
Cork City	212	€2,872,028	281	€4,522,819	263
Cork County	155	€1,539,363	199	€2,091,578	98
Donegal	167	€919,797	146	€1,003,576	89
Dublin City	499	€6,163,465	808	€11,635,088	575
Fingal	163	€1,938,780	139	€1,624,632	147
South Dublin	87	€627,407	27	€216,838	81
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown	5	€89,896	24	€262,768	19
Galway City	26	€474,050	25	€222,025	29
Galway County	76	€958,263	59	€705,347	37
Kerry	79	€718,938	127	€884,736	90
Kildare	49	€503,463	20	€359,808	24
Kilkenny	25	€484,430	23	€381,639	14
Laois	43	€257,014	12	€61,228	12
Leitrim	15	€229,072	9	€177,473	51
Limerick	94	€915,969	52	€500,689	18
Longford	16	€313,250	22	€426,535	23
Louth	14	€113,620	21	€292,279	8
Mayo	79	€464,508	174	€292,100	25
Meath	59	€1,037,501	54	€855,565	76
Monaghan	21	€92,751	13	€100,502	47
Offaly	30	€514,000	55	€551,532	53
Roscommon	34	€224,028	36	€258,773	80
Sligo	29	€311,648	39	€439,924	68
Tipperary	86	€935,801	115	€1,299,180	102
Waterford	32	€605,428	56	€488,724	90
Westmeath	56	€369,518	74	€650,813	43
Wexford	20	€316,307	24	€294,811	17
Wicklow	32	€650,204	43	€857,499	10
	2,333	€26,310,579	2,829	€33,538,679	2,308

table cont.

Area	Funding 2016	Units Returned in 2017	Funding 2017	Units Returned 2014 - 2017	Funding 2014 - 2017
Carlow	€69,450	8	€91,750	86	€786,961
Cavan	€307,530	31	€303,112	114	€1,266,797
Clare	€1,329,700	47	€966,203	287	€4,764,267

Cork City	€6,812,333	81	€1,485,357	837	€15,692,538
Cork County	€1,270,488	48	€1,130,977	500	€6,032,406
Donegal	€986,690	168	€1,866,898	570	€4,776,961
Dublin City	€8,757,848	543	€8,520,549	2425	€35,076,950
Fingal	€1,725,774	121	€1,329,300	570	€6,618,486
South Dublin	€703,736	87	€718,446	282	€2,266,427
Dún Laoghaire- Rathdown	€183,092	31	€283,531	79	€819,287
Galway City	€346,650	11	€124,150	91	€1,166,875
Galway County	€472,552	37	€401,159	209	€2,537,321
Kerry	€917,549	90	€1,101,143	386	€3,622,366
Kildare	€485,130	8	€205,960	101	€1,554,361
Kilkenny	€351,278	16	€307,749	78	€1,525,096
Laois	€97,053	4	€33,170	71	€448,464
Leitrim	€712,404	0	€0	75	€1,118,949
Limerick	€384,250	13	€215,520	177	€2,016,427
Longford	€506,705	0	€0	61	€1,246,490
Louth	€91,523	7	€83,518	50	€580,940
Mayo	€233,089	22	€261,986	300	€1,251,682
Meath	€1,435,700	52	€768,005	241	€4,096,771
Monaghan	€667,944	38	€505,254	119	€1,366,451
Offaly	€846,198	7	€107,792	145	€2,019,522
Roscommon	€808,612	3	€44,324	153	€1,335,737
Sligo	€1,097,909	40	€909,395	176	€2,758,876
Tipperary	€1,204,318	107	€1,324,604	410	€4,763,904
Waterford	€1,135,973	52	€574,309	230	€2,804,434
Westmeath	€436,062	40	€329,113	213	€1,785,506
Wexford	€167,007	34	€428,015	95	€1,206,140
Wicklow	€245,887	11	€276,778	96	€2,030,368
	€34,790,434	1,757	€24,698,067	9,227	€119,337,760

Local Authority Expenditure

1406. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the annual cost, number and location of social housing units in respect of which local authorities pay property management fees by local authority in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36734/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The payment of property management fees by local authorities is an operational matter for each individual local authority and my Department does not hold such information.

My Department does not allocate specific funding for property management purposes. Local authorities receive income from a variety of sources, including grants from Central Government, Local Property Tax, commercial rates and other locally-raised charges. Each authority is mandated to determine its own spending priorities, including the level of funding to be pro-

vided for property management, while having regard to locally identified needs and available resources.

Housing Adaptation Grant Funding

1407. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to a shortfall in the funding allocated to Limerick City and County Council for the purpose of making adjustments to council owned houses for disabled persons; if an extra allocation will be allowed in 2018 to help reduce the backlog that has built up; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36754/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department provides capital funding to all Local Authorities to undertake adaptations and extensions to their existing social housing stock under the Disabled Persons Grant (DPG) Scheme. The scheme applies to extensions that are needed to address over-crowding and the needs of older people or people with a disability, who may require stair lifts or the installation of a down-stairs bedroom or bathroom.

The total Exchequer funding allocated under the DPG scheme has increased by over 15% to €14 million in 2018 in comparison with €12 million in 2017 and my Department issued indicative allocations in respect of this scheme to all Local Authorities in July 2018.

It is open to local authorities to seek additional funding over and above this initial allocation and such requests will be facilitated, where funding availability allows.

Local Authority Housing Mortgages

1408. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to reduce the 10% deposit required to avail of a local authority housing loan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36763/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan Scheme is designed to enable credit worthy first-time buyers to access sustainable mortgage lending to purchase new or second-hand properties. The low rate of fixed interest associated with the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan provides first-time buyers with access to mortgage finance that they may not otherwise have been able to afford at a higher interest rate.

To support prudential lending and consistency of treatment for borrowers, a Loan to Value ratio of 90% applies to the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan as per the Central Bank’s prudential lending guidelines. Therefore, in order to avail of the loan, applicants must have a deposit equivalent to 10% of the market value of the property, and I have no plans to change what I believe is a financially prudent measure.

Applicants must provide bank or similar statements (such as post office, credit union etc.) for a 12-month period immediately prior to making an application, clearly showing a credible and consistent track record of savings. The cash savings should be no less than 3% of the market value of the property. Gifts are permissible up to 7% of the market value of the property, where their source is verified.

For prospective purchasers of newly-built properties, the availability, through the Revenue Commissioners, of the Help to Buy Initiative for first-time buyers may provide additional as-

sistance to prospective applicants for the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan.

Further information, including a Frequently Asked Questions section, is available on the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan website at <http://rebuildingirelandhomeloan.ie>.

Local Authority Housing Provision

1409. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the way in which the population growth targets under the national development plan will be implemented in each local authority; the impact of same on the capacity of local authorities such as in County Wicklow to make provision for housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36772/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The National Planning Framework (NPF), published together with the National Development Plan (NDP) as part of Project Ireland 2040 earlier this year, is intended by Government to provide the strategic context for future planning, development and investment over the next two decades. In addition, the NPF represents a long-term strategy for Government Departments, State agencies, State-owned enterprises, local authorities and others to support communities to achieve their potential for economic, social and infrastructural development through a shared set of strategic objectives and key principles.

As a strategic document, the NPF is currently being given further and more detailed expression at the regional level through preparation, by the local government sector, of statutory Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES) for the three Regional Assembly areas. The RSES process formally commenced earlier this year and draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies are currently in preparation for public consultation later in the Autumn. The finalisation of these regional strategies in the first half of 2019 will in turn prompt reviews and updates of individual county and city development plans to ensure strategic co-ordination and consistency between national, regional and local levels.

To assist in the preparation of these important plans, my Department published the Implementation Roadmap for the National Planning Framework in July 2018. Appendix 2 of this document provides details on transitional regional and county population projections for 2026 and 2031. These projections take account of the fact that, cumulatively, current city and county plans are based on post-2006 population projections and provide for a quantum of significantly greater population growth than previously occurred and that also exceeds any likely scenario identified as part of the NPF/NDP preparation process. The transitional regional and county population projections provided in the Roadmap set a growth trajectory approximately mid-way between what is currently proposed for in statutory development plans and a more evidence-based nationally coherent scenario to 2031 and 2040.

The Implementation Roadmap is available to view on my Department's website at the following link:

<https://www.housing.gov.ie/search/archived/current?query=Circular+FPS+04%2F2018>.

The RSES process, and the subsequent individual county/city development plan reviews, must address the growth of each region in accordance with the overall parameters set out in the NPF. The transitional population projections provided in the Roadmap are part of these parameters. The review process is intended to strengthen the settlement strategy within counties in light of more relevant and updated population projections whereby towns with capacity will be enabled to continue their logical planned growth within a coordinated county-wide strategy.

Regional and local decision-making at the appropriate level is also provided for through the approach above to shape how the development of all parts of the country, including County Wicklow, can be assured and guided through to 2040, including in the matter of ensuring that housing is provided at appropriate locations across the country and in line with infrastructural and service availability in place and planned for those places.

Question No. 1410 answered with Question No. 1363.

Question No. 1411 answered with Question No. 1384.

Tenant Purchase Scheme Review

1412. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when he plans to amend the conditions applicable to the tenant purchase scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36858/18]

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.

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 Adaptation Grant Funding

1413. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if additional funding will be allocated in 2018 to Cavan County Council for house improvement schemes such as the housing adaptation scheme in view of the importance of these schemes, particularly for elderly persons and persons in ill-health; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36869/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I announced funding of €66.25 million nationally in 2018 for the Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability. This included €1,457,964 for Cavan County Council, comprising exchequer funding of €1,166,371 and €291,593 from the local authority. It represents an increase of €42,395 for the grants for Cavan County Council in 2018 over 2017.

However, if the Council require additional funding in 2018, they can submit details to my Department in order to be considered for increased funding. My Department works closely

with the local Authorities to achieve a full drawdown of their allocations and there is careful scrutiny of spend, with any underspend redistributed to those local authorities with high levels of grant activity who seek additional funding.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

1414. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of homes approved under the affordable purchase scheme to date in 2018; the number anticipated in 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36872/18]

1419. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of units to be provided per annum under the affordable housing scheme from 2018 to 2023, inclusive, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36878/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1414 and 1419 together.

I refer to the reply to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 736 and 755 of 12 July 2018, which sets out the general position in relation to the affordable purchase scheme.

Based on initial estimates, the local authorities in Dublin, the Greater Dublin Area, Cork and Galway, 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 for at least 10,000 new affordable homes, and that analysis is progressing well.

Departmental Expenditure

1415. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the serviced sites fund is included under current or capital allocations under Vote 34; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36874/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): As is the case with the Local Infrastructure for Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF), funding for the Serviced Sites Fund will be provided from my Department's Capital Exchequer allocation, under subhead A.9 "Infrastructure Fund", as set out in the 2018 Revised Estimates Volume (REV) which can be accessed, on the website of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, at the following link: <http://www.per.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/REV-2018-compressed.pdf>.

Homeless Accommodation Funding

1416. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the annual expenditure on the homeless housing assistance payment since its inception to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36875/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Homeless HAP is a targeted support for homeless households who may find it difficult to secure HAP tenancies. The scheme has been successfully utilised by the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive (DRHE) across the four Dublin local authorities since February 2015, with more than

2,000 households currently being supported by the Homeless HAP scheme.

Homeless HAP assists households by providing the local authorities with the following options:

- the option to provide a deposit to secure property;

- the option to pay up to two months advance rent; and

- in the case of the Dublin local authorities only, an increase in the discretion ceiling from 20% to 50% to exceed the maximum rent limits, where necessary, allowing households to find suitable accommodation.

Aggregate recoupment of costs to the DRHE for rent in advance, deposits and HAP administrative payments, in respect of Homeless HAP and payments to landlords, in respect of homeless HAP households are as follows:

Landlord Payments 2015-2018 in respect of Homeless HAP (euro millions rounded)

LA	2015	2016	2017	2018 to date
DRHE (Dublin City Council)	€0.25	€4.49	€33.61	€28.74

In addition to the financial options set out above, another significant dimension to Homeless HAP was the establishment of the Placefinder Service, whereby local authorities can appoint dedicated staff to assist individuals in emergency accommodation to find appropriate exit options. The service has been in operation in the Dublin region since 2015 and the option to establish same was also made available to all local authorities from January 2018.

Departmental Reports

1417. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the report of the working group on short-term lets submitted to his Department; and when a targeted public consultation will be initiated on its proposals. [36876/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Arising from the detailed analysis provided by the Working Group referred to, which informed development of a range of proposals to establish an appropriate regulatory approach for short-term tourism-related lettings as well as identifying amendments to relevant legislation to give effect to such a regulatory regime, I am reviewing the Group's report and also examining the recommendations in the Oireachtas Committee's report on short-term lettings, and have been engaging with other relevant Ministers, in relation to the appropriate next steps in taking forward the proposed recommendations. Appropriate measures will be brought forward once that process is concluded.

Social and Affordable Housing Funding

1418. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the affordable dwellings fund will be established under Part 5 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36877/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): As I outlined in my reply to Parliamentary Question No. 2642 of 24 July 2018, I commenced the

relevant provisions of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, the effect of which was to place the new scheme for affordable purchase on a statutory footing.

Among the provisions commenced, Section 94 provides for the establishment of an Affordable Dwellings Fund to finance the operation of the affordable dwelling purchase arrangements. Housing authorities will pay into the fund monies received from affordable dwelling purchasers in the form of payments made during the charged period, on expiration of the charged period, on resale of the dwelling within the charged period, and monies received, before the coming into operation of this Part, under clawback arrangements for dwellings sold under previous affordable purchase schemes.

The section also provides that the Fund will be managed by the Housing Finance Agency, who may advance monies from the Fund to housing authorities for housing support purposes under this Act.

My Department has met with the Housing Finance Agency with regard to the establishment and operation of the Fund, and are continuing to consider the optimal arrangements in advance of the Fund needing to be operational.

Question No. 1419 answered with Question No. 1414.

Departmental Agencies

1420. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the anticipated launch date of the national regeneration and development agency; the per annum budget for the agency and its anticipated timeframe; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36879/18]

1423. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the proposed location of the headquarters of the regeneration and development agency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36882/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1420 and 1423 together.

Project Ireland 2040 signals a significant policy shift towards securing more compact and sustainable urban and rural development, which requires significantly more effective land management in key development areas. Against that background, it is proposed to establish a National Regeneration and Development Agency to assist in ensuring a more effective approach to strategic land management, particularly in terms of publicly owned land.

The Agency will act as a national centre of expertise, working with and supporting local authorities, public bodies and other interests, to harness public lands as catalysts to stimulate regeneration and wider investment and to achieve compact, sustainable growth, with a particular emphasis on complex regeneration projects and the provision of affordable housing.

Detailed arrangements in relation to the location, functions, powers and mechanisms and legislative arrangements for the establishment and operations of the Agency are currently being developed by my Department, in conjunction with the Department of An Taoiseach and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, with a view to their early finalisation.

Repair and Leasing Scheme

1421. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the per annum target for the repair and lease scheme in 2018; the number delivered to date; the anticipated expenditure per annum from 2019 to 2021, inclusive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36880/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Repair and Leasing Scheme (RLS) has been developed to assist local authorities or Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) to harness the accommodation potential that exists in certain vacant dwellings across Ireland.

The RLS is targeted at owners of vacant dwellings, who cannot afford or access the funding needed to bring their dwellings up to the required standard for rental property. Subject to the suitability of the dwelling for social housing, and the agreement of the property owner, the cost of the necessary repairs will be met upfront by the local authority or an AHB.

At the end of Q1 2018, a total of 942 applications had been received under the scheme. Local authorities were engaging with the property owners in relation to 684 properties, 52 agreements for lease had been signed and 15 homes had been delivered and tenanted. A detailed breakdown of the RLS scheme data up to end Q1 2018 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>.

I have made €32 million available for the scheme in 2018 and a total of €140 million over the period of Rebuilding Ireland 2016-2021.

Over the period 2016 to 2021, the national target is for the delivery of an additional 50,000 social housing homes through Build, Acquisition and Leasing Schemes. The ambition is for 33,500 of these homes to be delivered through new build programmes including Part V; for 6,500 to be delivered through Acquisition programmes including the Housing Agency Acquisition Programme; and for the remaining 10,000 homes to be delivered under a range of leasing initiatives including the RLS. Out of the total 10,000 homes to be delivered under Leasing, it is expected that 2,000 will be leased by local authorities in 2018 under a range of initiatives, including the Repair and Leasing Scheme (800), long term leasing and the new Enhanced Lease.

I wrote to all Local Authorities on 18 April 2018 setting out their social housing delivery targets for build, acquisition and leasing for 2018, and for the period 2018-2021. The targets are published at the following link:

<http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-social-housing-delivery-targets-for-local-authorities-2018-2021/>.

The RLS data for end Q2 2018 are currently being collated and will be published shortly.

Question No. 1422 answered with Question No. 1374.

Question No. 1423 answered with Question No. 1420.

Rental Sector

1424. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the estimated number of units to be delivered in each of the pilot projects for a new cost rental scheme; the timeframe for their delivery; the criteria for their allocation; and if he

will make a statement on the matter. [36883/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In light of the ongoing affordability challenge faced by renters in Dublin and other urban centres, it is a major Government priority that cost rental becomes a significant part of our rental sector. Together with delivering much more affordable and predictable rents, cost rental will make a sustainable impact on national competitiveness and the attractiveness of our main urban centres as places to live as well as work.

There are two pilot cost rental schemes currently being advanced; one at Enniskerry Road, in Dun Laoghaire Rathdown, and the other one at St. Michael's Estate in Inchicore, Dublin 8. It is expected that 50 affordable units and 100 social homes will be made available on the Enniskerry Road site. It is estimated that the site at St. Michael's Estate will accommodate over 470 homes. While the final tenure mix will be decided by Dublin City Council and informed by the detailed site development process, it will likely include 140 social housing homes, with the remaining 330 homes predominantly provided under cost rental.

In relation to Enniskerry Road, it is anticipated that construction will commence in the first quarter of 2019. With regard to St. Michael's Estate, Dublin City Council has appointed a dedicated project manager and a project team to drive this key project. In addition to pre-existing consultative arrangements, the City Council is also facilitating the establishment of a special Inchicore Regeneration Consultative Forum to focus directly on the development of this key project.

Once these pilot projects have progressed further, it is my intention to roll out cost rental projects across other suitable sites.

National Planning Framework

1425. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if county development plans currently under review should be suspended pending the issuing of regional planning guidelines with regard to the implementation roadmap for the national planning framework circular issued by his Department in July 2018. [36884/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The National Planning Framework (NPF), published under Project Ireland 2040, sits at the top of the planning policy hierarchy in Ireland and provides a structure for future development and investment over the next two decades. This national level planning policy is being implemented at the regional level through preparation of statutory Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES) for the three Regional Assembly areas. The RSES process formally commenced earlier this year with a pre-draft public consultation phase, following the launching of the NPF. Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies are currently being prepared for public consultation later this Autumn.

My Department recently issued Circular Letter FPS 04-2018 and the NPF Implementation Roadmap which provide guidance on the alignment of city and county development plans with the NPF. The Roadmap referred to the advisability of pausing local authority development plan review processes that are under way to await the latest data and policy contexts set out in the RSES.

The Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2018 includes provisions for the initiation of review of City/County Development Plans to be:

1. Deferred on a once-off basis, where due to commence prior to or within a period of 3 months after the initial making of the relevant RSES, until not later than a period of 3 months after the relevant RSES has been made; or

2. Temporarily suspended, where commenced and ongoing and where a draft plan has not been submitted to the members of the Planning Authority under Section 11(5)(a) of the Act, prior to the initial making of the relevant RSES in each case, until not later than a period of 3 months after the relevant RSES has been made.

These provisions should ensure an efficient and effective process of alignment between all the levels of spatial planning in our planning process, from national to regional to local. The Commencement Order, which is necessary for the formal commencement of these provisions, is being finalised by my Department, in conjunction with the Office of Parliamentary Counsel, with a view to these provisions coming into effect imminently.

The Circular and Implementation Framework are available on my Department's website at the following link: <https://www.housing.gov.ie/search/archived/current?query=Circular+FPS+04%2F2018>.

Vacant Sites Data

1426. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his Department is tracking the identification of vacant land by local authorities under the vacant site tax; the acres identified in each local authority to date; the proportion of this land in which the owner has been identified; the proportion of this land in which the owner has been notified; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36929/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 introduced the vacant site levy, which is a measure aimed at incentivising the development of vacant, under-utilised sites in urban areas. Under the Act, planning authorities are required to establish a register of vacant sites in their areas, beginning on 1 January 2017. Planning authorities have issued notices to owners of vacant sites by 1 June this year in respect of vacant sites included on their respective registers on 1 January 2018, indicating that the levy will apply to those sites on 1 January 2019.

While all 31 local authorities have established vacant site registers, not all registers have been populated to date as some local authorities are undertaking the necessary preparatory work in this regard, i.e. identifying qualifying vacant sites, their registered owners and commissioning the market valuations of such sites. As required under the Act, the planning authority must enter certain information on the register in relation to a vacant site, including name and address of owner, the folio reference, as appropriate, the market value together with the date of entry on the register.

My Department does not maintain a central register of vacant sites as each local authority administers the vacant site register in respect of their functional area. As provided for under the Act, the register in respect of each local authority is available for inspection at its offices and online on its website. However, on foot of a recent review of the on-line vacant site registers across all local authority areas, there are collectively almost 290 individual sites currently on the local registers. Over 160 of these sites were entered on the local vacant site registers on 1 January 2018 and will therefore be subject to the levy in 2019, unless development works are activated in the interim.

My Department has actively engaged with local authorities in relation to the implementa-

tion of the vacant site levy in order to ensure a consistent application of the levy provisions across all city and county areas and to facilitate the sharing of best practice. My Department has provided guidance and advice and also organised three separate information seminars for local authorities, most recently on 1 May 2018, which was attended by officials from every local authority.

My Department will continue to monitor implementation of the levy to ensure that it is being effectively applied, in line with its intended purpose of incentivising the development of vacant or under-utilised sites in urban areas.

Approved Housing Bodies

1427. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on the purchase by approved housing bodies, AHBs, with public funds of properties being sold by vulture funds that were previously sold by the National Asset Management Agency, NAMA; the cost of such acquisitions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36957/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) have an important role in delivering the social housing ambition set out in Rebuilding Ireland. There is a range of funding programmes available through local authorities to achieve this ambition, including relating to construction, acquisition and leasing activity. AHBs and local authorities work in partnership locally across these delivery streams.

A particular focus of acquisition related activity is targeting vacant properties and bringing them back into use for social housing. In that context, a specific Fund has been established and the Housing Agency has been provided with €70 m with the objective of acquiring some 1,600 units from banks and investment companies over the period to 2020 for social housing use. Properties acquired by the Agency using this Fund are sold on to AHBs utilising the Capital Advance Leasing Facility (CALF) and the funds received will then be recycled back into the fund for future acquisitions.

As at 31 August 2018, through the Housing Agency €70 m Acquisitions Fund, bids by the Housing Agency have been accepted on 786 properties, 23 of which are being sold by private investment funds whose loan charges were previously under the control of NAMA. Purchases have closed on 438 properties, two of which were sold by private investment funds whose loan charges were previously under the control of NAMA. The total value of these 23 properties is €5,703,800. The purchase of two of the 23 properties was complete as of the end of August with the other 21 properties being progressed. It is intended that these properties will be sold on to AHBs by the Housing Agency. These properties were part of a larger portfolio offered by an investment fund and it was considered in the public interest to purchase these particular properties to support social housing objectives.

Question No. 1428 answered with Question No. 1374.

Register of Electors

1429. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the unilateral decision by local authorities to alter the layout and chronology of the layout of the 2018-2019 electoral register and the local authorities'

obligation to provide the register in a usable format for public representatives; if his Department has been involved in the decision to change the layout of the way in which the register is presented; the instructions his Department provides to local authorities in respect of this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36962/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): The preparation of the Register of Electors is a matter for each local registration authority. It is their duty to ensure, as far as possible and with the co-operation of the public, the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the Register. The focus of my Department's work in relation to the Register is to support and assist registration authorities in ensuring that an appropriate legislative framework is in place.

The statutory provisions relating to the form and content of the Register are contained in Rule 2 of the Second Schedule of the Electoral Act 1992. It is provided there that if the registration area is a city, the names should be arranged in street order unless the registration authority consider that doing so would be inappropriate, having regard to the general character of any part of the area. If the registration area is an administrative county, the requirement is to arrange the names alphabetically in townland order unless the authority considers that arrangement in street or any other order is possible and convenient, having regard to the general character of any part of the area.

I understand that the Dublin registration authorities have published the 2018/2019 Register in street order, where appropriate, but by name alphabetically rather than by house number in each such street. However, in order to be of assistance to the councillors and Oireachtas members in their areas, I understand that the registration authorities have also sent to them a soft copy of the Register, which enables them to sort the register information for each street into house number rather than alphabetic order.

Wildlife Control

1430. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht when a seal cull will take place (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36101/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I refer the Deputy to the reply provided in response to his previous question, PQ Reference No. 31811/18.

While seals are protected species, my Department may issue licences to cull individual problem seals, and affected persons can apply for such licences. My Department has no plans to undertake a general cull of seals.

Arts Funding

1431. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the funding available for a textile artist whose creative skills and dedication to their art has helped them overcome mental health challenges that could have been overwhelming; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35430/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): The Arts Council, the main Irish Government agency for developing the arts, works in partnership with

and provides funding for arts, artists, arts organisations, public policy makers and others to build a central place for the arts in Irish life. The Arts Council would be best able to advise on potential sources of support in this case. The relevant local authority arts officer may also be able to assist.

The Arts Council offers a wide range of financial supports across artforms and arts practices, including arts and health. Financial supports are both direct and indirect and include bursaries, projects and travel and training awards.

The national arts and health website *www.artsandhealth.ie* was launched in October 2011 and provides a resource and focal point for the dynamic field of arts and health in Ireland. The website includes resource documents, case studies, a directory of contacts, perspectives on a range of issues and current news. The website was initiated and is funded by the Arts Council as an important element of its Arts and Health Policy. The website was developed by Waterford Healing Arts Trust (WHAT) in partnership with Create, the national development agency for collaborative arts in social and community contexts.

Arts Funding

1432. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if a building (details supplied) will be purchased for the local arts community; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35555/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): While my Department provides capital grants to the arts and culture sector for the maintenance and enhancement of arts and culture facilities the Department does not fund the purchase of land or buildings. The local authority may best be able to advise the organisation in these circumstances.

Comhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta

1433. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht further to Parliamentary Question No. 2790 of 24 July 2018, the number of early years educational settings participating in the ECCE programme in the Gaeltacht that are operating through the medium of Irish; and the number of children that attended these services from September 2017. [35602/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): As I indicated in my reply to PQ No. 2790 of 24 July 2018, Comhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta (CNNG) provides administration support and training services for Irish-medium early childhood education and care services which includes naíonraí, crèches, breakfast clubs, afterschool services and parent and toddler groups in Gaeltacht regions.

During the 2017/2018 school year, CNNG supported 96 early-years services throughout the Gaeltacht. I understand from Údarás na Gaeltachta that, of the 96 services supported by CNNG during the 2017/2018 school year, 74 services benefited from the Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme (ECCE), with a total of 1,069 children benefiting under the scheme.

National Monuments

1434. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the measures to be taken to ensure a monument (details supplied) does not fall into further disrepair; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35615/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): The site referred to by the Deputy is protected under the National Monuments Acts and any person proposing to carry out works at or in relation to it is required to give the Minister two months' advance notice. Any such works would also be subject to applicable planning and development legislation, for which the planning authority has specific responsibility.

I am advised that a representative from my Department's National Monuments Service has visited the site in question on a number of occasions with the Parish Priest and the local authority Heritage Officer to discuss and advise on particular work proposals and that the Department is now awaiting the formal statutory notification required for the works.

Voluntary Bog Purchase Scheme

1435. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 410 and 411 of 21 July 2016, if the commitment given in the reply will be implemented (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35720/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): The individuals referred to in the Deputy's Question applied to sell their interest in land in a raised bog natural heritage area under the voluntary bog purchase scheme, administered by my Department.

The 2014 Review of Raised Bog Natural Heritage Area Network concluded that Ireland could more effectively achieve conservation of threatened raised bog habitat through focused protection and restoration of a reconfigured network. Arising from this review, 46 raised bog natural heritage areas (including parts of 7 sites) are scheduled for de-designation. The Wildlife (Amendment) Bill 2016 provides for the de-designation of these sites.

The raised bog natural heritage area referred to in the Deputy's Question is scheduled for de-designation. Domestic turf cutting may continue on this site, while large-scale or commercial turf cutting will continue to be regulated through other consent systems. Arising from the 2014 Review and the proposed de-designation of the natural heritage area in question, the individuals referred to in the Deputy's Question were advised that my Department would not be proceeding with the purchase of their interest in land in the site under the voluntary bog purchase scheme.

Under the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000, compensation is payable arising from a refusal of consent, by the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, in relation to proposed works, in a natural heritage area, that were carried out lawfully in the five-year period preceding the refusal of consent. I understand that the individuals referred to in the Deputy's Question do not fulfill this criteria and would not be eligible for compensation in accordance with the provisions of that Act.

Public Sector Staff Sick Leave

1436. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will address a matter regarding sick pay in the case of a person (details supplied);

and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35860/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): While I cannot comment on individual cases or circumstances, the following sets out the position in relation to the Public Service Sick Leave Scheme and provisions for serious illness.

The Public Service Sick Leave Scheme came into effect on 31 March 2014. The administrative arrangement for paid sick leave for civil servants is set out in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's Circular 05/2018: Arrangements for Paid Sick Leave, which is available on DPER's website *www.circulars.gov.ie*. The rationale for the Scheme is to provide support to public servants who became ill while at the same time reduce the very high and unsustainable cost of sick leave in the public service. Although the new Scheme did reduce access to sick pay overall, it retained the previous access to sick pay for those public servants who suffer from a critical illness or injury.

Where an individual is out on sick leave their record over the previous four years is examined to determine if they have access to paid sick leave. This process is known as the 'look back' and is set out in the Public Service Management (Sick Leave) Regulations 2014 (S.I. No 124 of 2014).

Under the scheme, sick leave is paid at full pay for three months (i.e. 92 days) and at half pay for three months (i.e. 91 days) annually, subject to an overall limit of 6 months (i.e. 183 days) paid sick leave (at either full or half pay) in any four year period. In addition, there is provision for a longer period of sick leave to address a critical illness or serious physical injury under the Critical Illness Protocol (CIP). Under CIP, an individual may have access to extended sick leave of 6 months on full pay in a rolling 1 year period, followed by 6 months on half pay, subject to a maximum of 12 months' paid sick leave in a rolling 4 year period. Under the protective year, if an individual returns to work following CIP, he or she may continue to avail of the remaining extended sick leave for subsequent illness or injury, critical or non-critical which occur within 12 months of the first date of absence due to critical illness/injury.

If an individual has exhausted access to full or half pay they may access a further payment called Temporary Rehabilitation Remuneration (TRR) subject to certain conditions. It provides that where an individual has received 365 days' paid sick leave in a rolling 4 year period, he or she may be paid TRR for a maximum of 365 days (1 year). TRR may be paid for a further period of 730 days (2 years) where it is a direct continuation of an illness under the Critical Illness Protocol. The rate of TRR is based on pensionable service. Public servants who pay Class A PRSI may also receive Illness Benefit from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection in addition to TRR.

While I have outlined the general provisions of the Sick Leave Scheme that relate to critical illness, it is the individual's circumstances, including their sick leave record and the nature of the illness, that determines their access to sick leave. I am also advised that my officials have been in contact with the officer in question and have explained the sick leave regulations in depth.

Departmental Funding

1437. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the details of funding for an organisation (details supplied) in each of the past five years; if a copy of the service level agreement between her Department and the organisation will be provided; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35933/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): The capital funding provided to the venue referred to in the question by my Department over the last 5 years is set out in the table.

Year	Amount of Capital funding €
2018	150,000
2017	0
2016	0
2015	50,000
2014	44,328

In relation to capital funding it is policy that all grantees awarded funding enter into a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with my Department. Generally the SLAs set out the purpose for which funding is provided, public procurement procedures, legal matters, procedures for drawdown of funding, and reporting and accounting procedures.

A copy of the most recent SLA between my Department and the venue promoter is being sent to the Deputy for his information.

Wildlife Regulations

1438. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if her attention has been drawn to the ongoing inappropriate management of grasslands at a location (details supplied); if the matter will be investigated in accordance with regulations 27, 28 and or 29 as relevant of European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 SI 477 of 2011; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36017/18]

1439. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her plans to invoke regulations 27, 28 and or 29 as relevant of SI 477 of 2011 to restrict and regulate the management of the grasslands at a location (details supplied) to ensure that the appropriate management of the grasslands is being adhered to in order to sustain the Brent geese population; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36018/18]

1460. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if EU regulations under the habitats directive in respect of Brent geese feeding on a site (details supplied) will be enforced; if her attention has been drawn to the fact that the owners of this site have allowed the grass to grow too long thus endangering these birds; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36758/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1438, 1439 and 1460 together.

There is no basis for me as Minister to issue a Direction to restrict or regulate the management of these lands, which were formerly playing fields at St. Paul's College, Raheny, Dublin. These lands do not form part of a designated European site, are not an integral part of the core habitat for the Brent geese population, and I am not aware of any activity being carried out on the lands which meets any of the criteria for issuing of directions under the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011-2015.

Waterways Ireland

1440. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her plans to restore the mid-Shannon walkway on the Meelick Weir following the damage caused by the severe flooding of November 2009; if the funding required will be ring-fenced for this project; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36064/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): Waterways Ireland has informed me that planning for the Meelick Weir is at an advanced stage to bring this project to tender in the autumn of 2018 and funding has been allocated from the capital programme to commence works with site preparation and material purchase in 2018, subject to a successful tender process.

Capital funding is allocated to Waterways Ireland on an annual basis and this has increased by €900,000 from 2017 to 2018 with a total allocation of €3,580,000.

The estimate of cost to complete the work in 2019 is being finalised. The final figure will be confirmed upon completion of the procurement process.

Waterways Ireland

1441. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht when funding will be provided for a project (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36070/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): Waterways Ireland have informed me that planning is at an advanced stage to bring this project to tender in the autumn of 2018 and funding has been allocated from its capital programme to commence works with site preparation and material purchase in 2018, subject to a successful tender process.

Capital funding is allocated by this Department to Waterways Ireland on an annual basis and this has increased by €900,000 in 2017 to a total allocation of €3,580,000 in 2018.

The estimate of cost to complete the works in 2019 is being finalised. The final figures will be confirmed upon completion of the procurement process.

Culture Ireland

1442. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if funding is available for cultural groups to travel abroad to tour and perform; if funding is available as part of the St. Patrick's Day celebrations abroad; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36158/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): Culture Ireland which operates as a Division of my Department runs a funding support programme to promote the presentation of Irish arts by practising professional artists worldwide. Culture Ireland annually offers travel support for a large number of events by Irish artists globally over the St. Patrick's Day period as this is a key time for Ireland to present the strength of our arts and culture sector on the world stage.

The deadline by which events for St Patrick's day must submit is 15 October. Full details on Culture Ireland's eligibility criteria and application processes are available at <http://www.cultureireland.ie/funding>

Site Acquisitions

1443. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if discussions will be held with Tipperary County Council in relation to a site (details supplied) in order to acquire and develop the site as a visitor centre; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36302/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): My Department receives regular requests to acquire sites and to have them maintained, managed and presented to the public by the Office of Public Works (OPW) as national monuments.

National monuments already in State care number some one thousand sites at over 750 locations around the country. These command considerable resource commitments in terms of both funding and manpower and new acquisitions can, therefore, only be considered where a site has rare or unique features that clearly warrant it being taken into State care. Cognisance is also taken of the range of other monuments already in State care in the same general area of which there are a significant number in this particular case.

In these circumstances, my Department, which was in touch with the local authority at the time, did not consider that this property met the relevant criteria when it became available for purchase. I am advised, however, that it appears to have been sold in the meantime and that the new owners have indicated their intention to undertake any necessary conservation works and to also provide visitor facilities on the site. It is listed in the statutory Record of Monuments and Places and, therefore, also continues to be protected by the provisions of the National Monuments Acts 1930-2004.

Forbairt na nOileán

1444. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta cé méid airgead a ceadaíodh i 2018 chun oibreacha caipitil a dhéanamh ar na hoileáin amach ón gcósta, briste síos de réir an oileáin; cén daonra atá ag gach oileán atá i gceist; cén bunús ar a roinneadh an t-airgead; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [36341/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): Gach bliain, tugann mo Roinn cuireadh d'údaráis áitiúla a bhfuil oileáin le buan-chónaí faoina gcúram, iarratas a dhéanamh ar comh-mhaoiniú ar thograí infreastruchtúra ar na hoileáin sin nó gaolta leo. Iarrtar go mbeadh na tograí liostáilte in ord tosaíochta agus déantar iad a mheas i gcomhthéacs bhuiséad na Roinne. Rinneadh amhlaidh do 2018. Anuas ar seo, scrúdaíonn mo Roinn iarratais ar chúnadh do thograí caipitil eile de réir mar a fhaigheann sí iad, agus déantar deontais a cheadú dá réir.

Déanann an tábla thíos cur síos ar an méid a ceadaíodh de réir oileán in 2018, chomh maith leis an daonra atá ar na hoileáin sin de réir dhaonáireamh 2016.

Oileán	Deontais Ceadaithe in 2018	Daonra
Dhún na nGall		
Árainn Mhór	€ 186,500	469
Toraigh/Machaire Rabhar-taigh	€ 150,000	119
Oileán an Bhráighe	€ 22,500	12
Sligeach		

Oileán	Deontais Ceadaithe in 2018	Daonra
Inis Uí Mhaolchluiche	€ 18,750	3
Maigh Eo		
Cliara	€ 112,500	159
Cloigeann	€ 37,500	8
Inis Toirc	€ 189,000	51
Gaillimh		
Inis Bó Finne	€ 43,613	175
Inis Oírr	€ 349,149	281
Inis Mór	€ 12,429	762
Corcaigh		
An tOileán Mór	€ 82,500	167
Faoide	€ 73,500	18
Inis Fada	€ 48,750	20
Baoi	€ 26,250	4
Inis Arcáin	€ 82,500	111
Oileáin Éagsúla i gCorcaigh	€ 22,000	

Departmental Communications

1445. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the position in her Department and the organisations under its aegis that have arrangements in place for lo-call numbers or 1800, 1850 and 1890 phone numbers for members of the public to contact his Department or organisations under its aegis; the number of these that are completely free to call to persons that use mobile phones and may incur major bills phoning such organisations; if the situation will be reviewed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36395/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): As the Deputy will be aware depending on the mobile service provider used different charges apply to the customer when contacting landline, lo-call or premium numbers. I am advised that in all cases where my Department, or bodies under, make use of such numbers, details of standard directory numbers and other contact channels e.g. e-mail are also provided to the public.

Details of contact telephone numbers for the main offices of my Department including standard directory numbers and lo-call 1890 numbers are available on my Department's website at www.chg.gov.ie.

In relation to those bodies under the aegis of my Department, listed below, that use lo-call numbers I am advised that these may also be contacted using standard directory numbers:

- Arts Council
- National Archives
- National Museum
- Oifig an Chomisinéir Teanga
- An Foras Teanga.

EU Directives

1446. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if the derogations sought by Ireland under the EU Birds Directive in respect of seagulls will be reviewed; the advice she has received regarding this matter; her views on whether action needs to be taken regarding a major problem with seagulls in the Dublin area; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36410/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): The EU Birds Directive allows Member States to make derogations from its protective measures in respect of certain wild bird species in certain circumstances – for example, where they are causing damage to crops, livestock and fauna or represent a threat to public health or safety or to air safety. The Declarations to implement these derogations are renewed annually and an annual review of the Declarations is undertaken prior to their expiry.

Last year's review took into account the issue of seagulls in the North Dublin area especially in Balbriggan which had been the subject of correspondence to my Department from some community groups and other residents which proposed the inclusion of seagull species in the Declaration.

Following consideration of the matter, last year's Declaration, which was effective from 1 May 2017 to 30 April 2018, included methods to control seagull species in the Balbriggan area for public safety reasons. The control method involved the removal of eggs and nests only and the culling of seagulls was not permitted. Similar provision has now been made in this year's Declaration, effective until 30 April 2019.

My Department is currently undertaking a review of the derogation process under Article 9 of the EU Birds Directive which will take account of all relevant factors, including perceived threats, distribution and population data available in respect of all the bird species in the derogations. ANIAR Ecology were appointed by my Department to undertake the review following a public tendering process. My Department has received a draft report from the consultants and I expect a final report to be submitted shortly. The final report of the consultants will be published.

Departmental Funding

1447. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the funding that was sought for designated areas by her Department in the pre-budget submission for 2019; the number of persons that benefit from the NPWS farm plan scheme; if this scheme will be reinstated; her views on whether farmers with designated lands have been encumbered without financial reward for the protective management of these lands since 1996; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36456/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): My Department is currently in the midst of the Estimates 2019 process and it would be premature to indicate any funding amounts while these matters are under discussion.

The Farm Plan Scheme is currently operational, albeit on a limited basis, for farmers whose management of designated areas incurs costs or actions over and above payments received through other schemes, and it is my intention to increase the scope of the Scheme on a targeted and prioritised basis as funding permits. It must also be recognised that the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) is operating many targeted Locally Led Schemes

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as well as specific, and substantially-funded, European Innovation Partnership schemes for farmers in areas designated for Hen harrier and Freshwater Pearl Mussel interests. The DAFM GLAS scheme has provided prioritised entry into GLAS and elevated GLAS payments in certain designated areas. It is important that the Farm Plan Scheme is coherent with these schemes and the Basic Payment Scheme.

National Library

1448. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if the W.B. Yeats collection which is exhibited at the National Library, Dublin can be loaned to Sligo County Council (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36459/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): The matter to which the Deputy refers is a day-to-day matter for the National Library. I have however referred the Deputy's question to the National Library for their separate consideration and direct reply.

National Parks and Wildlife Service

1449. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the position regarding the discussions that were ongoing earlier in 2018 in respect of a location and in respect of Parliamentary Question No. 623 of 24 April 2018 (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36471/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): The National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department is continuing its discussions with the various interests with a mast presence in the area in question. The aim of these discussions continues to be not just to address the issue of payments but also enhancing the overall care and management of the site. While these discussions are significantly advanced, they have yet to reach a formal conclusion. Accordingly, it would be inappropriate to provide further details publicly at this time.

Scéim na gCúntóirí Teanga

1450. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** den Aire Cultúir, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta an bhféadfadh sí a dheimhniú go mbeidh €1.2 milliún, mar a fógraíodh i mí an Mheithimh, ar fáil anois do chlár na gcúntóirí teanga atá reáchtáil ag Muintearas agus Oidhreachta Chorca Dhuibhne do na scoileanna Gaeltachta; cén dáta tosaithe a bheidh ag clár na gcúntóirí teanga i mbliana; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [36511/18]

1451. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** den Aire Cultúir, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta an bhféadfaí cóip den tuarascáil a choimisiúnaigh a Roinn maidir le clár na gcúntóirí teanga a chur ar fáil; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [36512/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1450 and 1451 together.

Ba mhaith liom a dheimhniú gurb é allúntas méadaithe ar fiú suas le €1.02 milliún a d'fhógair mé i rith an tsamhraidh do Scéim na gCúntóirí Teanga i leith na scoilbhliana reatha

2018/2019. Tá bailchríoch á cur faoi láthair ag mo Roinn ar na socrúithe riaracháin a bhaineann leis an allúntas, i gcomhar leis an dá eagraíocht atá freagrach as an scéim a riar thar ceann na Roinne. Tá comhaontú feidhmíochta sínithe idir an Roinn agus Oidhreacht Chorca Dhuibhne agus tá na cúntóirí tosaithe ar ais sna scoileanna ó dheas ó thús na seachtaine seo (3 Meán Fómhair). Táthar ag súil le comhaontú feidhmíochta sínithe a fháil ó Mhuintearas an tseachtain seo chugainn agus beidh sé suas ag an eagraíocht sin ansin dáta a shocrú le go dtosóidh na cúntóirí ar ais i mbun a gcuid oibre i scoileanna Dhún na nGall, na Gaillimhe, na Mí agus Mhaigh Eo.

In ainneoin tuairiscí dá mhalairt sna meáin le déanaí, is féidir liom a dheimhniú nach bhfuil an t-athbhreithniú ar Scéim na gCúntóirí Teanga, a choimisiúnaigh mo Roinn, críochnaithe go fóill. Táthar ag súil leis an athbhreithniú seo a bheith críochnaithe agus tuarascáil ina leith foilsithe roimh dheireadh na bliana.

Departmental Agencies

1452. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of State agencies operating unpaid internships in 2017 and 2018. [36672/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): State agencies under the remit of my Department are occasionally approached by individuals seeking to gain work experience in a particular area on an unpaid basis. I understand that Five State agencies in 2017, and four in 2018, facilitated unpaid internships. The agencies in question work with these individuals to provide a high value experience, often around a specific project, over a short period of time.

Public Service Obligation Services

1453. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the status of the public service obligation air service to the Aran Islands; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36718/18]

1454. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if the tender process in relation to the public service obligation air service to the Aran Islands will be completed and the successful tenderer in place to commence the service on 6 December 2018 when the current contract terminates; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36719/18]

1455. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the stage the tendering process in relation to the public service obligation air service to the Aran Islands is at; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36720/18]

1456. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the work carried out by her officials to date on the preparation for the new contract in relation to the PSO air service to the Aran Islands; the schedule of work; the timelines of the remainder of the work to be completed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36721/18]

1457. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if the new contract in relation to the public service obligation air service to the Aran Islands will be different to the current contract; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36722/18]

1458. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if

representatives of the three island communities will be actively engaged in the formulation of the tender proposals and in the decision making process in selecting the successful operator for the public service obligation air service to the Aran Islands; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36723/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1453 to 1458, inclusive, together.

In June 2018, Galway Aviation Services Limited, trading as Aer Árann, informed my Department that it was withdrawing from its contract for the provision of a PSO air service to the Aran Islands, and also from the contract that secured the availability of Conamara Airport for the duration of the aforementioned air service contract, with effect from 6 December 2018.

Following this decision by the company, both I and my officials moved quickly to assure the islands' communities that it is a priority of the Department that an air service for the islands be maintained.

I arranged a meeting between representatives from the Aran Islands and public representatives from Galway West in June and agreed to engage with island representatives on an ongoing basis. My officials have, since then, also met with island representatives and arrangements are being made for a further meeting in the coming weeks. My officials have also met with their counterparts in the Department of Transport and have sought a meeting with the European Commission to discuss this issue. That a meeting will happen at the end of the month.

In parallel with this ongoing engagement, my Department is working towards a new tender competition with the aim of putting in place a contract for the next number of years. Neither a timescale for the running of this competition nor details of any contract that may emerge from it can be provided at this stage.

Primary Care Centres Provision

1459. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 389 of 26 September 2017 and 1640 of 17 April 2018 and further to a request made by the HSE to the islands division of her Department to acquire an identified site for a replacement primary health centre on Inisbofin, County Galway, if the site has been acquired; if not, when a decision will issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36732/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): I can confirm for the Deputy that a site adjacent to the airstrip on the island to be used for construction of a replacement primary health centre on Inishbofin has not yet been acquired by the HSE. My Department is in contact with both the HSE and the Irish Aviation Authority with regard to the issue and the matter is being progressed in the context of the review of submissions received as part of the public consultation process in relation to the Inishboffin and Cleggan airstrip sites.

Question No. 1460 answered with Question No. 1438.

Údarás na Gaeltachta

1461. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** den Aire Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta cén maoiniú atá ar fáil i mbliana d'Údarás na Gaeltachta chun tacú le fiontraíocht

agus chun fostaíocht a chruthú sa Ghaeltacht agus an gcuirfear airgead caipitil ar fáil chuige sin sa bhuiséad don bhliain seo chugainn mar atá geallta sa phlean forbartha náisiúnta; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [36824/18]

1462. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** den Aire Cultúir, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta cé mhéad post atá ceadaithe go dtí seo ag Údarás na Gaeltachta sna Gaeltachtaí éagsúla agus cad iad na himpleachtaí atá ag an nghanntanas maoinithe maidir le cur chun cinn na bpost seo; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [36825/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1461 and 1462 together.

Is é an ciste caipitil atá curtha ar fáil in 2018 d'Údarás na Gaeltachta ná €7m, i gcomparáid le ciste arbh fhiú €6.687m é don bhliain 2017. Ní miste a lua chomh maith gur cuireadh al-lúntais caipitil breise arbh fhiú €2.27m agus €2.4m ar fáil don Údarás in 2017 agus in 2016 faoi seach. Is ionann sin agus ciste €4.67m sa bhreis ar an mbunlíne a bheith curtha ar fáil don Údarás sna blianta sin.

Mar is eol don Teachta, is tríd an phróiseas meastacháin agus cáinainéise a dhéantar leithdháileadh ar an soláthar airgid a chuirtear ar fáil ar bhonn bliantúil do mo Roinn agus, go deimhin, do na Ranna Rialtais go léir.

Mar is iondúil déanfar cinneadh maidir le soláthar caipitil an Údaráis don bhliain seo chugainn mar chuid den phróiseas meastacháin níos déanaí i mbliana. I dtaca leis sin, is fiú a mheabhú don Teachta go bhfuil gealltanas sa Phlean Forbartha Náisiúnta 2018-2027, go méadófar buiséad caipitil Údarás na Gaeltachta go €12m in aghaidh na bliana. Tiofadh tuilleadh sonraí chun cinn maidir le maoiniú do thograí agus cláir ar leith, chomh maith le hamscála an chaiteachais ina leith, de réir mar a rachfar tríd an bpróiseas meastóireachta agus pleanála atá leagtha síos faoin gCód um Chaiteachas Poiblí.

Tuigim go bhfuil ós cionn 300 post nua ceadaithe ag Bord an Údaráis go dáta i mbliana. Tuigfidh an Teachta go dtiofadh na poist sin chun cinn de réir a chéile sa tréimhse amach romhainn.

Departmental Funding

1463. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the funding awarded from January 2018 to date; the schemes under which funding was awarded; the application and selection process for each award of funding; the identity of the recipients of the funding; the amount of funding awarded in each case; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36842/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): As the Deputy will appreciate my Department operates a wider range of funding schemes across all areas of the Departments' remit.

In view of this and because of the wide range of my Department's schemes and programmes, and the large volumes of payments and grants involved, it is not possible to provide the information sought. However, if the Deputy has specific queries relating to a particular programme or grant, I will endeavour to provide her with relevant information in that regard.

Details of funding allocations and awards are published on my Department's website at www.chg.gov.ie from time to time. In common with all Government Departments, details of

annual expenditure are also included in the annual Appropriation Accounts.

For the Deputy's convenience a summary of the various funding areas and the links to detailed information in respect of funding available from my Department is set out in the table below.

Programme Area	Details available at:
Arts Film and Investment	http://www.chg.gov.ie/about/information-requests/freedom-of-information/foi-publications-scheme/services-provided-by-the-department/arts-unit/#grantfunding
Cultural Policy and Institutions	http://www.chg.gov.ie/about/information-requests/%20freedom-of-information/foi-publications-scheme/services-%20provided-by-the-department/cultural-policy-and-institutions-unit/#grantfunding
Culture Ireland	http://www.cultureireland.ie/funding
Creative Ireland	https://www.chg.gov.ie/arts/creative-arts/creative-ireland-programme/
Built Heritage & Architectural Policy	http://www.chg.gov.ie/about/information-requests/%20freedom-of-information/foi-publications-scheme/%20services-provided-by-the-department/built-heritage-%20and-architectural-policy-unit/#grantfunding
National Monuments Service	http://www.chg.gov.ie/about/information-requests/freedom-of-information/foi-publications-scheme/services-provided-by-the-department/national-monuments-service/#grantfunding
Gaeltacht Support Schemes	https://www.chg.gov.ie/gaeltacht/the-gaeltacht/language-support-schemes-programmes/
Irish Language Support Schemes	https://www.chg.gov.ie/gaeltacht/the-irish-language/language-support-schemes/

Appointments to State Boards Data

1464. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the boards under the remit of her Department on which there are vacancies; when the vacancies first arose; the status of the procedure to fill the vacancies; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36843/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): The table below gives details of current vacancies on the State boards under the remit of my Department.

Board	No. of current Vacancies	Vacancy arose
Crawford Art Gallery	1	May 2017
Foras na Gaeilge	3	N/A – North/South body

National Museum of Ireland	3	October 2017 (Staff representative vacancy)January 2018 (x2)
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A process is currently underway with the Public Appointments Service (PAS) to fill vacancies on the Board of the National Museum of Ireland: the closing date for expressions of interest was 8th August 2018 and I anticipate that I will receive a shortlist of the names of suitably qualified candidates shortly. One of the vacancies on the Board of the National Museum is reserved for a representative from the staff of the Museum: a process in relation to filling this vacancy, as set out in Section 19 of the National Cultural Institutions Act, 1997, is also currently underway.

A PAS process to identify a person for appointment to the Board of the Crawford Art Gallery is pending.

With regard to the vacancies on the Board of Foras na Gaeilge: appointments to boards of North/South bodies are made by the North South Ministerial Council, on the basis of 50:50 nominations from each jurisdiction. the current vacancies on the board are in respect of Northern nominations.

EU Legislation

1465. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the EU legislation awaiting transposition by her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36844/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I am advised that there are at present three outstanding pieces of EU legislation which require transposition into Irish law by my Department, and that the relevant legal instruments are currently at an advanced stage of drafting, with a view to full transposition over the coming months. The details are set out in the table.

EU legislation	Deadline for transposition
Directive 2014/52/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 amending Directive 2011/92/EU on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment	16 May 2017
Regulation (EU) No 511/2014 on compliance measures for users from the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilisation in the Union (hereinafter ‘the EU ABS Regulation’).	June 2015
Regulation (EU) No. 1143/2014 on invasive alien species.	January 2016

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