

Written Answers.

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

Questions Nos. 1 to 13, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 14 to 42, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 43 to 51, inclusive, answered orally.

Defence Forces Remuneration

52. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his views on the protest of 19 September 2018 regarding pay and conditions in the Defence Forces. [39913/18]

58. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his views on the demonstration by members of organisations (details supplied); if the demonstration has impacted on his approach to budget 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40063/18]

74. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his views on the Defence Forces veterans and families march over pay and conditions. [40065/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 52, 58 and 74 together.

I am aware of the views expressed and the issues raised in relation to the Parade which took place on 19 September 2018. I note in particular the call for the restoration of pay.

As you are aware, similar to other areas of the public service, the pay of Permanent Defence Force personnel was reduced as one of the measures necessary to stabilise national finances during the financial crisis.

The economic recovery and a resumption of economic growth has provided the fiscal resources to provide for a sustainable and fair recovery in public service payscales.

Defence Forces pay and that of other public servants is increasing in accordance with public sector pay agreements. The focus of these increases is weighted in favour of those on lower pay. The Permanent Defence Force Representative Associations balloted their members, who voted to accept the terms of these pay agreements.

Members of the Permanent Defence Force have received the pay increases due under the Lansdowne Road Agreement. In addition in 2017, following negotiations with PDFORRA improved pay scales for general service recruits and privates, who joined the Permanent Defence Force post 1 January 2013, were implemented.

The Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 provides for increases in pay, ranging from 6.2% to 7.4% over the lifetime of the Agreement. The first increase 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 fact, enlisted members of the Permanent Defence Force will see the increase in today's wage packet. Further increases in pay are scheduled for 2019 and 2020.

By the end of the current Public Service Pay agreement the pay of all public servants (including members of the Defence Forces), earning under €70,000 per annum, will be restored to pre FEMPI levels. The restoration of the 5% reduction to allowances cut under FEMPI is also scheduled in the agreement.

New entrants to the Defence Forces will also benefit from the measures which were recently announced in relation to amendments to the pay scales for new entrant public servants recruited since January 2011.

Measures such as the implementation of the Working Time Directive for members of the Permanent Defence Force and a review of contracts for enlisted personnel are under active consideration. The Department of Defence is engaging with the Permanent Defence Force Representative Associations on these matters through the Conciliation and Arbitration scheme.

Defence Forces Medical Services

53. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the supports provided for members of the Defence Forces who undergo traumatic experiences while serving on UN mandated missions. [39908/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): At the outset I would like to assure the Deputy that the Defence Forces are fully aware of the importance of providing the robust supports required by personnel for whatever reason. A range of medical and non-medical services are available to ensure that Defence Forces personnel are medically fit to undertake the duties assigned to them and to treat any medical condition that may arise.

Psychiatric and psychological services, as well as the Defence Force Personnel Support Service (PSS), are available to members of the Defence Forces. These provide for the diagnosis and treatment of psychiatric or psychological disorders through to counselling and critical incident stress management.

Defences Force personnel preparing for deployment overseas undergo a rigorous programme of training designed to help them carry out their peacekeeping mission and provide for their protection. As part of the mission readiness process, all such personnel are provided with briefings, by qualified PSS staff, on critical incidents and their effects, along with stress management and wellness. Personnel are also issued with the Defence Force guide to Critical Incident Stress Management, which provides useful information including how to manage stress associated with such incidents.

In response to any significant operational incidents at home or overseas, PSS personnel trained in Critical Incident Stress Management are deployed to provide both one-to-one and group psychological support. In addition, prior to deployment, PSS trains a cross section of personnel in Critical Incident Stress Management Peer Support which enables them to provide initial psychological support, or Psychological First Aid as it might be called, to any personnel who may be affected by a traumatic incident. Such support would include normalising the reactions, enhancing individual stress management and where appropriate referral of personnel to

additional resources such as the unit medical officer.

Defence Forces personnel have, while on a tour of duty and following their return home, access to a Primary Carer Medical Practitioner, either military (Medical Officer) or civilian (GP), whose role it is to assess, diagnose, treat and refer individuals as necessary. Personnel experiencing psychological issues can be referred for assessment and treatment as appropriate.

I am satisfied that these measures provide comprehensive supports to individuals in the Defence Forces who may require them, and I can assure you that all such supports are kept under review.

Overseas Missions

54. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the position regarding the activities of the Defence Forces in the Golan Heights UNDOF mission, in particular their transition back to the Syrian side of the area relevant to the mission; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39998/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Since its establishment in 1974, UNDOF has been a successful mission in supporting the efforts of the international community both in the Golan Heights and in the Middle East region. A contingent of the Permanent Defence Force has been deployed to the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) since 2013.

Following significant events in August 2014 in the area of separation, the UNDOF mission relocated temporarily from Camp Faouar on the Syrian side of the area of separation to Camp Ziouani on the Israeli side of the area of separation.

The process to return to the Syrian side of the area of separation was commenced in 2016 with the enhancement of force protection measures at Camp Faouar.

In March 2018, the UNDOF Headquarters returned to Camp Faouar and the Chief of Staff UNDOF, Colonel Michael Dawson, together with seven other members of the Defence Forces moved with the headquarters. The main Irish contingent, comprising a Force Reserve Company of some 130 personnel, completed their relocation to Camp Faouar on 3 September 2018. Their role includes the provision of a Quick Reaction Force which is on standby to assist with the on-going operations within the UNDOF Area of Responsibility. The Irish Infantry Group is also tasked with carrying out patrols and convey escorts as necessary.

The relocation of Irish personnel follows on-going assessment of the security situation in the region and the continued enhancement of the force protection measures and living standards within Camp Faouar.

The UNDOF mission maintains regular contact with the Israeli Defence Forces and Syrian Arab Armed Forces in the context of its role in the area of separation, ensuring the security and safety of its personnel and a common understanding of its role between the parties.

The continued presence of the UNDOF mission remains an important element in ensuring stability on the Golan Heights and the Middle East region.

As the Deputy will be aware, there has, unfortunately, been a delay this week in the return home of personnel from the 57th Infantry Group and the deployment of the 58th Infantry Group. This was due to circumstances beyond our control. The Department of Defence, the

Department of Foreign Affairs and Ireland's embassy in Cairo are actively engaging with authorities in Lebanon and Syria and with the UN and the UNDOF mission to secure the relevant clearances in order to ensure the rotation of the contingent and the return home of those personnel completing service with UNDOF at the earliest opportunity.

Question No. 55 answered with Question No. 51.

Overseas Missions

56. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to increase the number of Defence Forces personnel deployed overseas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39923/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): As of 01 October 2018, Ireland is contributing 616 personnel to 9 different missions throughout the world. The main overseas missions in which Defence Forces personnel are currently deployed are the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) with 353 personnel, the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) in Syria with 128 personnel and the Naval Service EU Naval Mission (Operation Sophia) with 61 personnel.

The UNIFIL mission in Lebanon continues to represent Ireland's largest overseas deployment and on 22 May 2018 the Government approved the continued participation of the Defence Forces in UNIFIL for a further 12 month period. Irish troops are currently serving as part of a joint Irish-Finnish Battalion in UNIFIL. Since May 2015 the Finnish contingent has included an Estonian Platoon comprising some 36 personnel.

When I sought Government approval, I advised that both Finland and Estonia will withdraw from the Irish-Finnish Battalion in UNIFIL on 31 December 2018. I also informed Government that options were being examined for replacing the Finnish contingent, including the option for the temporary increase of the Irish Defence Force contingent.

In August 2018, I advised the Government that I have approved the additional deployment of approximately 106 Defence Forces Personnel to the UNIFIL mission to cover the backfilling of the absent Finnish contingent for the 12 period from November 2018 to November 2019. Discussions are on-going with potential partner countries who may be in a position to provide a permanent replacement for the Finnish contingent after November 2019.

The Department of Defence constantly reviews the deployment of Defence Forces personnel overseas. With regard to any future deployments of Defence Forces personnel overseas, Ireland receives requests, from time to time, in relation to participation in various missions and these are considered on a case-by-case basis.

Naval Service Vessels

57. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if the construction of the multi-role naval vessel at an estimated cost of €200 million that it has been decided will be purchased has been put out to tender; if so, if a tender has been accepted; if the purchase price or part thereof or other procurement costs of the vessel will be included in his Department's allocation in budget 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39911/18]

68. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the rationale for the purchase of a new multi-role naval vessel; and if he will make a statement on the

matter. [40060/18]

70. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the details of the planned purchase of a multi-role naval vessel; the cost of the vessel; the tendering procedures; if this will be part of budget 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40059/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 57, 68 and 70 together.

As I have already stated, my priority as Minister with Responsibility for Defence is to ensure that the operational capability of the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service is maintained to the greatest extent possible so as to enable the Defence Forces to carry out their roles as assigned by Government both at home and overseas.

As the State's principal sea-going agency, and in accordance with international and domestic law, the Naval Service, through its patrols, undertakes a variety of functions in the maritime domain in accordance with its role in contributing to maritime security. This encompasses the provision of support to other Government Departments and Agencies such the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, An Garda Síochána, the Revenue Commissioners and the Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority. The Defence Forces will continue to provide a range of supports to these Bodies in accordance with its roles in aid to the civil power and to the civil authority and as set out in the applicable Memoranda of Understanding and Service Level Agreements. In addition, the Naval Service role has expanded in recent years with significant additional operational requirements for the Naval fleet in the Mediterranean Sea.

Future Naval Service capabilities are being planned as part of the White Paper project planning process which will determine the Defence Organisation's maritime capabilities. The White Paper provides for the replacement of the current Naval Service flagship LÉ Eithne with a multi role vessel (MRV). It is the Government's intent that this new vessel will provide a flexible and adaptive capability for a wide range of maritime tasks, both at home and overseas. The acquisition of a modern vessel will ensure that the operational capabilities of the Naval Service, as the State's principal seagoing agency, are maintained to the greatest extent and takes account of the overall policy approach in the White Paper on Defence.

Planning has commenced on this project and it is intended to hold a public tender competition in due course to cover the supply of the MRV. The design and configuration of the vessel is being considered as part of the planning process. The Deputy has speculated that the new MRV will cost €200m. However it is the case that the cost of the MRV will only be known once the tender competition is concluded. This procurement is, of course, subject to the availability of funding within the overall Defence capital funding envelope. As the budgetary position for 2019 has not yet been finalised, it would be premature of me to discuss the Defence allocation in that regard. However, I remain very committed as Minister with Responsibility for Defence to continue to work to ensure that the financial resources are made available to the Defence organisation to ensure that the required equipment and infrastructure projects proceed in a diligent manner so as to enable the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service carry out their various roles, both at home and overseas.

Question No. 58 answered with Question No. 52.

Defence Forces Remuneration

59. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his views

on whether additional resources allocated to the area of defence should be prioritised at addressing soldiers' pay and conditions as opposed to prioritising military hardware; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39910/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Appropriate investment in Defence capabilities is an essential component of a coherent defence policy. It is necessary to invest in equipment and infrastructure as well as personnel. In this context, approximately 72% of the Defence Vote 36 budget relates to pay and pensions and the balance relates to current expenditure for running costs and capital expenditure. An increase in the pay allocation to the detriment of non-pay and capital expenditure is not a viable option.

The restoration of pay for all public servants, including Defence Forces personnel is a priority for me and for the Government.

Similar to other areas within the Public Service, the pay of Permanent Defence Force personnel was reduced during the financial crisis as one of the measures necessary to stabilise the national finances. The economic recovery and a resumption of economic growth has provided the fiscal resources to provide for a sustainable and fair recovery in public service pay scales.

Defence Forces pay is increasing in accordance with public sector pay agreements. The focus of these increases is weighted in favour of those on lower pay. Members of the Permanent Defence Force have received the pay increases due under the Lansdowne Road Agreement. In addition in 2017, following negotiations with PDFORRA improved pay scales for general service recruits and privates, who joined the Permanent Defence Force post 1 January 2013, were implemented.

The Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 provides for increases in pay ranging from 6.2% to 7.4% over the lifetime of the Agreement. The first increase 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 fact enlisted members of the Permanent Defence Force will see the increase in today's wage packet. Further increases in pay are scheduled for 2019 and 2020.

New entrants to the Defence Forces will also benefit from the measures which were recently announced in relation to amendments to the pay scales for new entrant public servants recruited since January 2011.

By the end of the current Public Service Pay agreement the pay of all public servants (including members of the Defence Forces), earning under €70,000 per annum, will be restored to pre FEMPI levels. The restoration of the 5% reduction to allowances cut under FEMPI is also scheduled in the agreement.

Defence Forces Equipment

60. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the extent to which military equipment, including vehicles, aircraft and sea-going vessels, continue to be upgraded and updated in line with best international practice and in anticipation of Brexit, which is likely to involve greater responsibilities for the Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40068/18]

73. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans for the purchase of military equipment including a multi-role vehicle; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39909/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 60 and 73 together.

My priority as Minister with Responsibility for Defence is to ensure that the operational capability of the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service, is maintained to the greatest extent possible to enable the Defence Forces to carry out their roles as assigned by Government.

The acquisition of new equipment for the Defence Forces remains a clear focus for me. Future equipment priorities are being considered in the context of the lifetime of the White Paper on Defence as part of the capability development and equipment planning priorities planning process.

The mid life upgrade programme for the Army's fleet of eighty MOWAG Armoured Personnel Carriers will extend the utility of the fleet and provide greater levels of protection, mobility and firepower. Additionally, twenty four 4 x 4 Armoured Utility Vehicles were acquired in 2017, and this year we are taking delivery of ten new armoured logistic vehicles. These measures will provide essential force protection overseas. There are currently no plans for the purchase of a Multi-Role Vehicle.

The Government is currently investing in updating the Air Corps fleet of aircraft with the replacement of the existing five Cessna aircraft with three larger and more capable fixed wing utility Pilatus PC 12 aircraft which are being equipped for ISTAR (Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance). These aircraft will be delivered in 2019 and 2020. Planning is also in progress to replace the CASA Maritime Patrol aircraft and a tender competition is currently underway in this regard.

The ongoing Naval Service ship replacement programme is evidence of the Government's commitment to investment in the Naval Service. Three new Offshore Patrol Vessels have been delivered since 2014 and a fourth is due to be delivered later this year. In addition, planning is underway for the replacement of the current Naval Service flagship LÉ Eithne with a multi role vessel.

The examples given, whilst not exhaustive, demonstrate my commitment to update and upgrade the Defence Forces equipment and capability, within the financial envelope available. As part of budgetary negotiations for 2017, additional capital funding was allocated bringing the capital envelope up to €416m over the 2018-2021 timeframe. This will allow for significant investment in equipment and infrastructure over the coming years.

As I have previously outlined to the House, the UK decision to exit from the EU does not of itself give rise to greater responsibilities for the Defence Forces. Prudent planning in relation to all security situations that may require a Defence Forces response is part of the day-to-day operations of the Defence Forces and, as such, is addressed within existing resources.

Should a situation arise beyond the contingent requirement for Defence Forces deployment already provided for in the Defence Vote, this would be addressed in the normal course within the budgetary discussions on defence funding.

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

Defence Forces Contracts

61. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to implement the Working Time Directive for members of the Defence Forces. [39960/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): As I have previously informed the House, a Government Decision dated 18 November 2016 approved the drafting of the Heads of Bill to amend the Organisation of Working Time Act, 1997. This will remove the blanket exclusion of An Garda Síochána and members of the Defence Forces from its range and will be subject to the application of the appropriate exclusions and/or derogations permitted by Directive 2003/88/EC. Work is underway in both the Department of Defence and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection towards the progression of this decision.

The Department of Defence and the Defence Forces have undertaken significant work in examining the nature of the duties of the Defence Forces and how the Working Time Directive can be applied to the members of the Defence Forces. It is necessary to ensure that all work arrangements meet all of the provisions of the Directive, including arrangements to manage changes in work practices. The review of Defence Force activities found that it would appear that a high percentage of the normal everyday work of the Defence Forces is already in compliance with the Directive. Certain activities were identified which the military authorities consider cannot be undertaken within the terms of the Directive without compromising the operational effectiveness of the Permanent Defence Force and would require exemption from the provisions of the Directive, while certain other activities would require derogation from its terms.

The Department of Defence is engaging through the Conciliation and Arbitration process with the Defence Forces Representative Associations to discuss the application of the Working Time Directive to the Defence Forces.

Litigation taken by a member of the Permanent Defence Force in respect of the applicability of certain elements of the Working Time Directive to the Defence Forces was settled recently in the High Court having regard to the specific circumstances of that case. Further litigation in relation to the Working Time Directive as it relates to the Defence Forces is pending.

For these reasons it would not be appropriate to comment further.

Question No. 62 answered with Question No. 51.

Defence Forces Strength

63. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his views on the fact that Army units are being forced to operate with less than 50% of their commissioned officer ranks; his further views on whether this compromises command, safety, governance and well-being of those who serve; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40003/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The 2015 White Paper on Defence commits to maintaining the strength of the Permanent Defence Forces at 9,500 personnel, comprising of 7,520 Army, 886 Air Corps and 1,094 Naval Service.

The whole time equivalent strength of the Permanent Defence Force for the end of September is estimated at 9,000 personnel which includes the 95th Cadet Class of 85 recruits which was inducted on the 24th September.

The 9,500 establishment provides for the full staffing of each Unit within the Defence Forces organisational structures. The strength versus establishment for each Unit is determined by

the extent to which vacancies within the establishment for each Unit is filled. There are vacancies across most Units and recruitment efforts are underway to address those vacancies.

As of 31 August 2018, the number of whole-time equivalent officers was 1,115 representing 90.4% of the agreed establishment strength of 1,233 officers. The suggestion that there are 50% vacancies in Officers in Units is clearly at variance with these figures.

In this context, personnel deployed from Units or engaged in development training should not be confused with vacancies. Units are maintained in order that personnel can deploy, not for Units to remain fully manned in barracks. The Defence Forces have always drawn personnel from Units for overseas service and other deployments, and personnel also engage in training on an ongoing basis. Such commitments can result in Permanent Defence Force personnel normally garrisoned in a Barracks not being present at a particular moment in time, but present on other occasions.

The Permanent Defence Force has a higher level of turnover than other areas of the Public Service and this is a feature of military organisations. This is not a new development, although there are recruitment and retention challenges, particularly with regard to certain specialists. Under my direction, these issues have been raised with the Public Service Pay Commission, which is currently further examining these matters. Additionally there is ongoing recruitment and a range of alternative recruitment approaches are being developed.

I have brought forward a White Paper project to examine skills gaps across the Defence Forces. This will provide an opportunity to examine any gaps arising across the Defence Forces and to bring forward recommendations having regard to work practices, training practices and other issues arising.

The manpower requirement of the Defence Forces is monitored on an ongoing basis in accordance with the operational requirements of each of the three services. Personnel are posted on the basis of operational needs across the organisation both at home and abroad.

With the support of the Chief of Staff and within the resources available, it is intended to retain the capacity of the Defence Forces to operate effectively across all roles and to undertake both the home and overseas tasks laid down by Government.

Questions Nos. 64 and 65 answered with Question No. 51.

Defence Forces Representative Organisations

66. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he will report on the engagements he has had with an association (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39925/18]

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.

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 on-going engagement on a regular basis between the Official side and the Representative side on a range of items which are processed through C&A.

I have met with representatives from PDFORRA on a number of occasions. My most recent meeting with members of the National Executive took place on 12 September 2018, where we discussed a number of matters which PDFORRA have in the Conciliation and Arbitration process. As matters dealt with under the C&A Scheme are confidential in nature it would not be appropriate for me to comment further.

I will be attending the PDFORRA Annual Delegate Conference in Breaffy House, Castlebar, Co. Mayo later today, where I look forward to meeting the delegates.

Defence Forces Medicinal Products

67. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the details of planned overseas deployment of Defence Forces in the coming 12 months; if the service-level agreement for the provision of Lariam has been extended with the HSE; his plans to prescribe mefloquine, known as Lariam, to those who will be deployed in deployment zones in which there is a risk of malaria; and the sources from which the Defence Forces will acquire this drug, which is now unavailable here. [39964/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): As of 1 October 2018, Ireland is contributing 616 personnel to 9 different missions throughout the world. The main overseas missions in which Defence Forces personnel are currently deployed are the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) in Syria and EU Naval Mission EUNAVFORMED (Operation Sophia). An additional deployment of approximately 106 Defence Forces personnel to the UNIFIL mission for the 12 month period November 2018 to November 2019 has recently been approved. Other missions in which the Defence Forces are deployed are Mali (EUTM Mali), Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUFOR), Kosovo (KFOR), Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) and Western Sahara (MINURSO). Ireland also contributes observers and staff to various UN and OSCE posts. With regard to any future deployments overseas, Ireland receives requests from time to time, in relation to participation in various missions and these are considered on a case-by-case basis.

I had previously indicated to the Deputy that drugs, including Lariam (mefloquine) are purchased by the Defence Forces under the four year framework agreement between the Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association (IPHA) and the HSE. For completeness, this is the framework agreement on the Supply and Pricing of Medicines (2016-2020) negotiated between the Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association, the Department of Health, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the HSE.

The military authorities have now clarified that, as Lariam was withdrawn from the Irish Market by the manufacturers, it falls outside the Framework Agreement. The Defence Forces have advised that they currently source Lariam through wholesalers that are authorised to supply exempt products.

The Deputy is aware that there are three anti-malarial drugs, namely Lariam (Mefloquine), Malarone and Doxycycline which continue to be used by the Defence Forces. All of these anti-malaria drugs have contraindications and side effects. I have indicated on many occasions that

the use of anti-malaria drugs is a medical matter that should be decided by qualified medical professionals. In the Defence Forces these are decisions for highly qualified Medical Officers, having regard to the specific circumstances of the mission and the individual member of the Defence Forces. Significant precautions are taken by the Defence Forces Medical Officers in assessing the medical suitability of members of the Defence Forces to take any of the anti-malarial medications.

I had previously indicated that a Working Group was re-convened to review developments arising in relation to malaria chemoprophylaxis and the use of Lariam, particularly in the context of the current potential litigation. The Working Group has produced its Second Report which has been provided to me. It has made a total of twelve recommendations many of which focus on areas including planning, training and education/information sharing as well as the establishment of a New Medical Advisory Group. This will formalise the provision of ongoing expert medical advice, including external medical advice, to the Defence Forces in relation to a range of medical matters.

Given that there is litigation pending it would be inappropriate for me to comment further. However, I wish to assure the Deputy that the health and welfare of the men and women of the Defence Forces is a key priority for me and the Defence Forces.

Question No. 68 answered with Question No. 57.

Naval Service Strength

69. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he is satisfied that the Naval Service has sufficient operationally deployable personnel and resources to carry out sea fisheries protection duties effectively in view of the decline in sightings and boardings to July 2018 relative to previous years. [40028/18]

79. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if the Naval Service has sufficient capacity in terms of personnel to fulfil its sea fisheries protection duties as well as maintaining the participation of a ship in Operation Sophia; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40029/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 69 and 79 together.

As the Deputy may be aware, the main day to day role of the Naval Service is to provide a fishery protection service in accordance with the State's obligations as a member of the European Union.

To this end, the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA) has a Service Level Agreement with the Department of Defence. This is intended to ensure efficient enforcement of sea-fisheries law at sea through the support provided by the Naval Service and the Air Corps. In accordance with this Agreement, the 2018 Annual Control Plan includes a target range of between 1,090 and 1,267 patrol days. The Naval Service is working in close cooperation with the SFPA in relation to a re-emphasis of a risk based approach to fishery protection to better utilise national resources - that is, delivering fewer boardings but of a much higher quality. The detention of a Spanish registered fishing Vessel recently for alleged infringements relating to the removal of shark fins is one example of this approach working.

The Naval Service deployment to the Mediterranean is factored into the overall Patrol Plan. Notwithstanding some mechanical and staffing restrictions experienced at present, the Naval

Service continues to fulfil all roles assigned by Government, including fishery protection, security operations and other policies, including a deployment in the Mediterranean.

Question No. 70 answered with Question No. 57.

Defence Forces Retirements

71. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his views on whether the current level of turnover in the Defence Forces is dysfunctional; and his plans to address same. [39962/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Given the unique and demanding nature of military life, it is understandable that there is a relatively high level of turnover among Defence Forces personnel. This is not a new phenomenon 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 worldwide and is not unique to Ireland.

The selective use of short-term statistics in relation to turnover can be misleading and confusing. Based on figures provided to me by the military authorities, the overall numbers departing the Permanent Defence Force in recent years are broadly consistent with the long term trends.

However there are some exceptions and as the Deputy will be aware, under my direction, the Department brought the issue of recruitment and retention of certain specialists to the attention of the Public Service Pay Commission. The Government will study any recommendations arising from the Public Service Pay Commission when they are published.

To address vacancies in these specialist positions, I have initiated a range of actions including a new scheme to provide for former members of the Permanent Defence Force, who retain required specialist skills, to re-enter the Defence Forces. Additionally the scope to further expand direct entry of personnel with specialist skills is being considered.

Applicants from the general service recruitment campaign held earlier this year will be inducted between September and end November. A second general service recruitment campaign was launched on 10 September 2018 and will close on 7 October 2018.

The pay of the Defence Forces is also increasing in accordance with public sector pay agreements. The pay of a newly qualified 3 star Private has increased by 25% in the last twelve months and at €27,257 is very favourable when compared to entry rates across the public service. The starting rates for newly qualified Officers is €35,000 and for new graduate Officers is in excess of €40,000. These amounts are inclusive of Military Service Allowance. This compares favourably to the average starting pay for graduates across other sectors of employment.

By the end of the current public service pay agreement the pay of all public servants, including members of the Defence Forces, earning under €70,000 per annum will be restored to pre-FEMPI levels. The restoration of cuts to military allowances will also be considered in the context of the agreement.

New entrants to the Defence Forces will benefit from the measures which were recently announced in relation to amendments to the pay scales for new entrant public servants recruited since January 2011.

I remain committed to ensuring that the Defence Forces retain the capacity to operate ef-

fectively across all roles required of them by Government at home and overseas.

Defence Forces Remuneration

72. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if his attention has been drawn to the hardship experienced by members of the Defence Forces as a result of poor pay and conditions; if he will recognise and engage with a group (details supplied) as a trade union; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39912/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Similar to other areas of the public service, the pay of Permanent Defence Force personnel was reduced during the financial crisis.

The recovery in the economy has afforded the opportunity for the Government to begin the restoration of pay to all public servants. Defence Forces pay is continuing to increase in accordance with public sector pay agreements. The focus of these increases is weighted in favour of those on lower pay.

Members of the Permanent Defence Force have received the pay increases due under the Lansdowne Road Agreement. In addition in 2017, following negotiations with PDFORRA improved pay scales for general service recruits and privates, who joined the Permanent Defence Force post 1 January 2013, were implemented.

The Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 provides for increases in pay ranging from 6.2% to 7.4% over the lifetime of the Agreement. The first increase 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. Further increases in pay are scheduled for 2019 and 2020.

By the end of the current Public Service Pay agreement the pay of all public servants (including members of the Defence Forces), earning under €70,000 per annum, will be restored to pre FEMPI levels. The restoration of the 5% reduction to allowances cut under FEMPI is also scheduled in the agreement.

New entrants to the Defence Forces will also benefit from the measures which were recently announced in relation to amendments to the pay scales for new entrant public servants recruited since January 2011.

The Public Service Pay Commission was established to provide objective advice to Government in relation to Public Service remuneration policy. In 2017, under my direction, the Department of Defence brought issues of recruitment and retention in the Defence Forces to the attention of the Public Sector Pay Commission (PSPC). As a direct result of that initiative the PSPC is conducting an in-depth evidence based examination of those issues.

The Department of Defence has provided data as requested by the PSPC for consideration. The Commission's work is on-going. The Department of Defence will continue to engage with the Public Service Pay Commission throughout the process and will give due consideration to the findings and recommendations that arises from the work of the Commission.

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 PD-FORRA (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 the many changes in the industrial relations landscape since the C&A scheme for members of the Permanent Defence Force began, I considered it appropriate to conduct a fundamental review of the scheme, at this time, to ensure that it remains efficient and effective for all parties.

I appointed Mr. Gerard Barry to chair the review. I received Mr. Barry's report last week and I am considering the findings and recommendations. While I asked Mr. Barry to consider the issue of the representative associations affiliating with ICTU in the course of his review, there are no plans to provide full trade union rights to the Permanent Defence Force representative associations.

Question No. 73 answered with Question No. 60.

Question No. 74 answered with Question No. 52.

Defence Forces Review

75. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if a review of Defence Forces human resources strategies has been completed in line with the commitment in the White Paper on Defence 2015 to do so (details supplied); the recommendations of that review in regard to dealing with the recruitment and retention crisis in the Defence Forces; and the recommendations made in regard to addressing the increased workload of remaining members caused by vacancies in the Defence Forces. [40030/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The White Paper on Defence sets the defence policy agenda for the next ten years. As a subset of the totality of the work being carried out to implement the White Paper, nearly 90 actions or projects were specifically identified. The extract on page 73 (Chapter 7) of the White Paper, to which the Deputy refers, does not relate to an individual review but rather encompasses the 29 White Paper projects identified as pertaining to Chapter 7.

Of these 29 projects, work has been initiated and is underway on 11 projects. These projects range from a commissioning from the ranks programme to a project aimed at developing further initiatives to encourage more women to apply for the Defence Forces & participate at all ranks. A gap analysis of skills sets in the Permanent Defence Forces has also been brought forward.

Implementation of all remaining projects will be carried out on a phased basis over the remainder of 10 year programme period. This process is being kept under review and will be subject to change as issues arise and other business dictates.

Other HR reviews and revision, outside of these 29 projects, have been undertaken, i.e. the criteria for extending service beyond twelve years have been revised and an examination of retirement ages for enlisted personnel has been prioritised. The effect of the application of the Working Time Directive to the Defence Forces is expected to be a consideration in any review of Defence Forces Human Resources strategy. Furthermore the military authorities have introduced additional initiatives to enhance work-life balance and this is also to be welcomed.

Last year I initiated a review of the C&A Scheme for the Permanent Defence Force and I have recently received the report from the independent chair, Mr. Gerard Barry. I am currently reviewing the recommendations contained therein and I look forward to engaging fully with all parties in progressing reforms to the existing Scheme.

Curragh Plains Representative Forum

76. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the engagement between his Department and Kildare County Council regarding ongoing land management and maintenance of the Curragh Plains. [40066/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): As the Deputy will be aware, both the Department of Defence and Kildare County Council are members of the Curragh Forum which was established in March 2016 and provides “stakeholders with an opportunity for the consideration / progress of a wide range of issues regarding the use, management and long term development of the Curragh Plains”.

My Department met with Kildare County Council on 18 September 2018 to discuss the vision paper commissioned by the Council reflecting on the potential of the Curragh Plains and to highlight some of the challenges currently faced in the management of the Plains.

The Department and Kildare County Council are currently exploring the potential for collaboration on addressing issues and identifying opportunities for the improved management and presentation of the Plains.

To this end, the Department has confirmed its support of Kildare County Council’s recent application for funding from the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund, administered by the Department of Rural and Community Development, to appoint a multidisciplinary consultancy team in order to examine the current and future challenges arising for the Curragh Plains, in the context of the conservation & management of the Curragh Plains and the scope for branding and the development potential as a high value visitor and cultural amenity attraction.

Air Corps Strength

77. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his views on the fact that Air Corps air traffic control continues to operate on restricted timelines due to inadequate trained manning levels. [40002/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): As with other areas of the public service, challenges have arisen in relation to the recruitment and retention of personnel in particular areas of expertise. The loss of experienced personnel is driven by a range of factors, including the availability of attractive job opportunities in the wider economy.

The Air Corps is experiencing a shortage of trained Air Traffic Control (ATC) personnel which has necessitated a reduction in operating hours. Actions are underway to return to previous levels of ATC services. ATC training is taking place. Options to ensure the longer term sustainability of ATC services in Baldonnel are also being identified.

It is important to note that while actions are underway, there is a requirement to continue to build the capacity of the Air Corps and it will take some time for a return to previous levels of capability.

Public Service Pay Commission

78. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he has made a submission to the Public Service Pay Commission; and if not, the reason for the delay in making this submission. [40031/18]

82. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the status of submissions relating to his Department made to the Public Service Pay Commission; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39924/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 78 and 82 together.

The Public Service Pay Commission was established to provide objective advice to Government in relation to Public Service remuneration policy. In 2017, under my direction, the Department of Defence brought issues of recruitment and retention in the Defence Forces to the attention of the Public Sector Pay Commission (PSPC). As a direct result of that initiative the PSPC is now beginning an in-depth evidence based examination of those issues.

The Department of Defence has provided data as requested by the PSPC, for consideration. This data was sourced by a civil-military working group. The Commission's work is ongoing and I am aware that the Commission has surveyed certain members of the Defence Forces. It was assisted in this regard by my military management.

My Department will continue to engage with PSPC throughout the process and due consideration will be given to the findings and recommendations that arise from the work of the Commission.

Question No. 79 answered with Question No. 69.

Naval Service Promotions

80. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he is satisfied that the systems and structures in place to encourage and facilitate the promotion of female officers and ratings to higher ranks within the Naval Service are adequate in view of the fact that no female chief petty officer has been appointed since 1995. [40027/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Defence Forces are an inclusive, equal opportunity organisation that encourages participation of women at all levels. All promotion competitions are open to female members of the Naval Service and, while no female personnel have been promoted to the rank of Chief Petty Officer in the Naval Service to date, female Petty Officers have competed in the competitions.

Such competitions are merit based and the gender of the candidate plays no role in the selection process. They are competency based competitions and require candidates to meet qualifying criteria as laid down in the promotion agreements.

The Defence Forces are committed to promoting equality in all aspects of their work and this is clearly set out in the Defence Forces Equality Policy, which commits to ensuring that the principles of equality are adhered to in all its employment policies, procedures, instructions and regulations. A Gender Advisor has been appointed to promote gender equality policies and training within the Defence Forces.

A Women's Network was established in 2016 and its aim is to support women in their work and to lead to their greater participation at all levels. There are also 30 trained facilitators within the Defence Forces which conduct female-only meetings in order to allow women to explore gender equality and military professional themes in an atmosphere of confidentiality and trust.

In addition, the Naval Service has a Female Forum, for all ranks, that meets regularly to discuss issues relevant to female personnel in the Naval Service and to develop a network to extend support opportunities and enhance their naval experience.

Career advice and mentoring is provided to all Naval Service Personnel through Branch Warrant Officers and the Naval Service HR Officer.

Notwithstanding these proactive initiatives, over the lifetime of the White Paper further projects will be progressed to ensure that the development and promotion of strategies that support increased female participation in the Defence Forces is continued. Such projects include:

- Developing further initiatives to encourage more women to apply for the Defence Forces and to increase female participation at all ranks.

- Conducting a survey to identify any impediments to the advancement of women in the PDF

Defence Forces Recruitment

81. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to recruit personnel to the Permanent Defence Force; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40057/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): There are significant recruitment opportunities available in the Permanent Defence Force, at both enlisted and officer level, for eligible individuals who wish to have a rewarding and positive career in service to the State. General service recruitment campaigns, an officer cadetship competition, a competition for Air Corps apprentices and a competition for instrumentalists in the DF School of Music were all undertaken in 2018.

In addition, the Defence Forces Medical Corps are currently accepting applications from suitably qualified medical doctors and the Naval Service has a number of opportunities for Bridge Watch-keeping Officers (Operations Branch), Marine Engineering Officers and Electrical Engineer Officers.

Arising from the general service recruitment campaign held earlier this year, new recruits are being inducted between September and November. The 95th Cadet Class of 85 recruits was inducted on the 24th September.

A second general service recruitment campaign was launched on 10 September 2018 and will close on 7 October 2018. This will provide recruits for Q1/Q2 of 2019.

The position will be reviewed towards the end of 2018 and recruitment plans for 2019 will then be finalised.

Question No. 82 answered with Question No. 78.

Defence Forces Remuneration

83. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to deal with the outstanding issues of low pay across the Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40062/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Defence Forces continue to offer excellent career prospects with opportunities for lifelong learning and self development for new and serving members.

Similar to other sectors in the public service, the pay of Permanent Defence Force personnel was reduced as one of the measures to assist in stabilising national finances during the financial crisis.

Pay is being restored to members of the Defence Forces and other public servants in accordance with public sector pay agreements. The focus of these increases is weighted in favour of those on lower pay.

Members of the Permanent Defence Force have received the pay increases due under the Lansdowne Road Agreement. In addition in 2017, following negotiations with PDFORRA improved pay scales for general service recruits and privates, who joined the Permanent Defence Force post 1 January 2013, were implemented.

The Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 provides for increases in pay ranging from 6.2% to 7.4% over the lifetime of the Agreement. The first increase 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 fact enlisted members of the Permanent Defence Force will see the increase in today's wage packet. Further increases in pay are scheduled for 2019 and 2020.

By the end of the current Public Service Pay agreement the pay of all public servants (including members of the Defence Forces), earning under €70,000 per annum, will be restored to pre FEMPI levels. The restoration of the 5% reduction to allowances cut under FEMPI is also scheduled in the agreement.

New entrants who joined the Defence Forces since 2011 will also benefit from the measures which were recently announced in relation to amendments to the pay scales for all such new entrants to the public servants. This amendment should it be accepted by the Representative Associations will be effective from 1 March 2019.

The Public Service Pay Commission was established to provide objective advice to Government in relation to Public Service remuneration policy. In 2017, under my direction, the Department of Defence brought issues of recruitment and retention in the Defence Forces to the attention of the Public Sector Pay Commission (PSPC). As a direct result of that initiative the PSPC is conducting an in-depth evidence based examination of those issues.

The Department of Defence has provided comprehensive data, as requested by the PSPC, for consideration. This data was sourced by a joint civil-military group. The Commission's work is on-going. I am aware that the Commission has been surveying members of the Defence Forces and have been facilitated in doing this by Defence Forces military management. The Department of Defence will continue to engage with the Public Service Pay Commission throughout the process and will give due consideration to the findings and recommendations that arise from the work of the Commission.

Defence Forces Personnel

84. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if regulations that exclude members of the Defence Forces from participating in marches or parades will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39999/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Given the unique roles assigned to the Defence Forces, there are a range of restrictions that apply to members of the Defence Forces relating to political and industrial relations matters.

Section 103 of the Defence Act prohibits members of the Permanent Defence Force from membership of, or subscription to, any political organisation or society; DFR A9 prohibits participation by uniformed members of the Defence Forces in any demonstration, meeting or function of a political character; DFR A7 prohibits at any time unauthorised communications that pertain to service matters by members of the Defence Forces. Members of the Defence Forces are also prohibited from striking. There are no plans to review this legislation.

In recognition of these restrictions, there is a statutory based system of representation and a dedicated conciliation and arbitration scheme which provides the framework for claims regarding pay and conditions for members of the Permanent Defence Force. Under these arrangements PDFORRA and RACO are the representative bodies for members of the Permanent Defence Force. In addition, there is also statutory provision for dealing with complaints by members of the Defence Forces including a dedicated Ombudsman for the Defence Forces.

The Department of Defence, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and military management continue to fully engage with PDFORRA and RACO through the C&A scheme on matters relating to pay and conditions.

Defence Forces Remuneration

85. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if all decisions made under the conciliation and arbitration scheme for the Defence Forces have been implemented; and the reason for the delay in implementing outstanding decisions. [39961/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Conciliation and Arbitration scheme for members of the Permanent Defence Force (PDF) provides a formal mechanism for the PDF representative associations, i.e. RACO and PDFORRA, to engage with the Official side. Having regard to commitments under national public service pay agreements, the representative associations can make representations in relation to the pay and conditions of their members. 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.

There are a number of outstanding adjudication findings across the public service, including the Defence Forces, which cannot be implemented at this time having regard to the provisions of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act, 2009-2015.

The Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020, provides for consideration of a process to address any outstanding adjudications, having due regard to the question of their continued validity and cost implications. The process to initiate discussions in this regard has commenced.

Ministerial Meetings

86. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the events he has attended with the Minister of State with special responsibility for Defence in the past

two years. [29288/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): A range of powers and responsibilities were delegated to me as Minister with Responsibility for Defence by the Defence (Delegation of Ministerial Functions) Order 2017, made on 5 July 2017 under s. 2(1) of the Ministers and Secretaries (Amendment) (No. 2) Act 1977.

In that role, I have attended numerous events since my appointment. The Taoiseach has been in attendance at a number of these events, including the recent launch of Ireland's bid for a seat on the United Nations Security Council.

Ministerial Briefing

87. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of departmental briefings he has received since becoming Minister of Defence in 2016. [29289/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): A range of powers and responsibilities were delegated to me as Minister with Responsibility for Defence by the Defence (Delegation of Ministerial Functions) Order 2017, made on 5 July 2017 under s. 2(1) of the Ministers and Secretaries (Amendment) (No. 2) Act 1977. In that role, I am in daily contact with my officials as part of the on-going business of the Department including defence policy matters. The Taoiseach is briefed as required on defence issues.

Ministerial Briefing

88. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he has met and received a briefing from the Defence Forces Chief of Staff since 1 January 2017. [29290/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): A range of powers and responsibilities were delegated to me as Minister with Responsibility for Defence by the Defence (Delegation of Ministerial Functions) Order 2017, made on 5 July 2017 under s. 2(1) of the Ministers and Secretaries (Amendment) (No. 2) Act 1977. In that role, I frequently meet with the Chief of Staff of the Defence Forces and receive regular briefings in relation to a wide range of defence matters.

The Taoiseach is briefed as required on defence issues.

Departmental Properties

89. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if houses, apartments or family accommodation in the ownership of his Department will be provided to a trust that would refurbish the properties and provide homes for military personnel (details supplied). [40170/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The provision of housing accommodation is a matter in the first instance for my colleague the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government and the local authorities falling under the remit of that Department. My Department is committed to providing whatever assistance possible to support

the implementation of the Government strategy on housing and homelessness.

In this regard, my Department engages with local authorities in relation to the transfer of appropriate property holdings outside of barracks that are no longer required for military purposes and that could form part of the general housing stock available to local authorities. It should be noted that particular issues arise in relation to providing accommodation to civilians within an operational military barracks, foremost amongst them being security.

Given that my Department is not the policy holder in this area and is already engaged as a matter of course with the relevant authorities in relation to the transfer of appropriate property as outlined above, it is not envisaged that it would in effect develop an additional administrative mechanism to replicate the function of local authorities.

In relation to specific cases of difficulty, when requested to do so, my Department and the Defence Forces provide whatever support possible to assist personnel in accessing available housing supports. In addition, the services of the Defence Forces Personnel Support Service are also available if required.

Defence Forces Remuneration

90. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the steps being taken to address the issues of pay and conditions in the Defence Forces. [40186/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Similar to other areas of the public service, the pay of Permanent Defence Force personnel was reduced during the financial crisis.

The recovery in the economy has afforded the opportunity for the Government to begin the restoration of pay to all public servants. Defence Forces pay is continuing to increase in accordance with public sector pay agreements. The focus of these increases is weighted in favour of those on lower pay.

Members of the Permanent Defence Force have received the pay increases due under the Lansdowne Road Agreement. In addition in 2017, following negotiations with PDFORRA improved pay scales for general service recruits and privates, who joined the Permanent Defence Force post 1 January 2013, were implemented.

The Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 provides for increases in pay ranging from 6.2% to 7.4% over the lifetime of the Agreement. The first increase 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. Further increases in pay are scheduled for 2019 and 2020.

New entrants to the Defence Forces will also benefit from the measures which were recently announced in relation to amendments to the pay scales for new entrant public servants recruited since January 2011.

By the end of the current Public Service Pay agreement the pay of all public servants (including members of the Defence Forces), earning under €70,000 per annum, will be restored to pre FEMPI levels. The restoration of the 5% reduction to allowances cut under FEMPI is also scheduled in the agreement.

In 2017, under my direction, the Department of Defence brought issues of recruitment and retention in the Defence Forces to the attention of the Public Sector Pay Commission. The De-

partment of Defence has provided data as requested by the Commission, for consideration. The Commission's work is ongoing. My Department will continue to engage with the Commission throughout the process and will give due consideration to the findings and recommendations that arise from the work of the Commission.

Defence Forces Retirements

91. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to address the issues of staff retention in the regular Defence Forces. [40187/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The nature of military service requires that the age and health profile of personnel in the Defence Forces must be appropriately managed to ensure that capability requirements are met. In this context, the Defence Forces have a higher level of turnover than other areas of the public service and this is a feature of military organisations internationally. The overall numbers departing the Permanent Defence Force in recent years are broadly consistent with the long term trend, with some exceptions.

Rates of pay and conditions of employment in the Irish public service have traditionally been set by, amongst other things, reference to levels of pay across the various sectors of the Irish public service. Defence Forces pay is increasing in accordance with public sector pay agreements. The focus of these increases is weighted in favour of those on lower pay. Following on from previous pay increases, the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 provides for 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. A 1% increase in annualised salaries due from 1 January 2018 has been paid and a further 1% was due on 1st October 2018. New entrants to the Defence Forces will also benefit from the measures which were recently announced in relation to amendments to the pay scales for new entrant public servants recruited since January 2011

In 2017, under my direction, the Department of Defence raised certain recruitment and retention issues as part of the submission to the Public Service Pay Commission. In a further acknowledgement of these issues the Government tasked the Public Service Pay Commission with examining these challenges in the Defence Sector in more detail. The Public Service Pay Commission has commenced this work.

The Permanent Defence Force continues to offer excellent career opportunities for serving personnel and for new entrants. Ensuring that the terms and conditions of serving members of the Permanent Defence Force are fair and balanced, is also a key consideration. There are a range of actions outlined in the White Paper on Defence (2015) which are aimed at advancing this goal and, in this context, there is an ongoing programme of HR development within the Defence Organisation.

The measures I have set out address a range of factors and are aimed at ensuring that the Defence Forces retain the capabilities to undertake the roles assigned by Government and remains a valued career choice.

Army Barracks Closures

92. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to close Cathal Brugha Barracks or St. Bricin's Military Hospital and for these sites to be used to

develop housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40227/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): There are no plans to close Cathal Brugha Barracks. The Land Development Agency have recently identified the St. Bricin's Hospital site as possibly suitable for development. In this context, I have requested my officials, with the co-operation of the Defence Forces, to explore the viability and implications of the relocation of the medical facility to an alternative location should the LDA confirm that it wishes to acquire those premises.

Overseas Missions

93. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the current level of deployment and location of Irish troops overseas on UN or EU-related missions; the extent to which further missions are planned or required; the extent to which the need for upgrading of equipment has been noted arising from such deployment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40312/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): As of 01 October 2018, Ireland is contributing 616 personnel to 9 different missions throughout the world and also to a range of international organisations and National representations. The main overseas missions in which Defence Forces personnel are currently deployed is the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) with 353 personnel, the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) in Syria with 128 personnel and the Naval Service EU Naval Mission (Operation Sophia) with 61 personnel.

Full details of all personnel currently serving overseas are shown in the tabular statement beneath.

The UNIFIL mission in Lebanon continues to represent Ireland's largest overseas deployment with 353 personnel and on 22 May 2018 the Government approved the continued participation of the Defence Forces in UNIFIL for a further 12 month period.

Irish troops are currently serving as part of a joint Irish-Finnish Battalion in UNIFIL. Since May 2015 the Finnish contingent has included an Estonian Platoon comprising some 36 personnel. Due to other National commitments both Finland and Estonia intend to withdraw from the Irish-Finnish Battalion in UNIFIL by 31 December 2018.

Efforts are on-going to source a partner country to replace the Finnish contingent but, in the interim, I have approved the additional deployment of approximately 106 Defence Forces Personnel to the UNIFIL mission to cover the backfilling of the absent Finnish contingent for a 12 month period from November 2018 to November 2019.

The Department of Defence constantly reviews the deployment of Defence Forces personnel overseas. With regard to any future deployments of Defence Forces personnel overseas, Ireland receives requests, from time to time, in relation to participation in various missions and these are considered on a case-by-case basis.

Defence Forces personnel serving on all overseas missions are equipped with the most modern and effective equipment to carry out their mission. The Defence Forces equipment is upgraded on a continual basis. This equipment enables troops to fulfil the roles assigned to them, as well as providing the required protection specific to the mission.

MEMBERS OF THE PERMANENT DEFENCE FORCE SERVING OVERSEAS

AS OF 01 OCTOBER 2018

UN MISSIONS	-
UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon) HQUNIFIL 112th Infantry BattalionUNIFIL Sector West HQ	103538
UNTSO (United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation) Israel & Syria	13
MINURSO (United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara)	3
MONUSCO (United Nations Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic of the Congo)	4
UNDOF (COS Staff/FHQ Staff - Camp Faouar - Bravo side)UNDOF 57th Infantry Group (Camp Faouar - Bravo side)	8120
TOTAL	501
UN MANDATED MISSIONS	
EUFOR (EU-led Operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina)	5
EUTM Mali (EU-led Training Mission)	20
KFOR (International Security Presence in Kosovo) HQ	12
Naval Service EU Mission (Op Sophia) L.É. James Joyce Operational HQ/Floating HQ (Operation Sophia HQ - 2 in OHQ & 2 in FHQ)	574
TOTAL NUMBER OF PERSONNEL SERVING WITH UN MISSIONS	599
ORGANISATION FOR SECURITY AND CO-OPERA- TION IN EUROPE (OSCE)	
Staff Officer, High Level Planning Group, Vienna	1
TOTAL NUMBER OF PERSONNEL SERVING WITH OSCE	1
EU MILITARY STAFF	
Brussels	5
MILITARY REPRESENTATIVES/ADVISERS/STAFF	
Military Adviser, Permanent Mission to UN, New York	1
Military Adviser, Irish Delegation to OSCE, Vienna	1
Military Representative to EU (Brussels)	4
Liaison Officer of Ireland, NATO/PfP (Brussels)	2
EU OHQ Operation Althea, Mons, Belgium	1
Irish Liaison Officer to SHAPE & Military Co-Op Divi- sion, Mons, Belgium	2
TOTAL NUMBER OF DEFENCE FORCES PERSON- NEL SERVING OVERSEAS	616

94. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the extent to which Army, Naval Service and Air Corps training continues to be in line with modern and international best practice; if particular procedures are shown to be in need of updating; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40313/18]

97. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the degree to which ongoing training of the Army, Naval Service and Air Corps, including reserves, is scheduled in the course of the next three years; the extent to which such ongoing training meets international best practice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40316/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 94 and 97 together.

The primary function of training and education in the Defence Forces is to develop and maintain the capabilities necessary to enable them to fulfil the roles laid down by Government.

The Defence Forces conduct training and education under four broad categories namely; Leadership, Skills, Career, and Collective. Leadership Training is the medium through which the Defence Forces ensure that personnel are prepared for exercising command authority across the full range of military functions both at home and overseas in international operations. Skills Training ensures that Defence Forces personnel have the requisite individual, specialist, and crew skills. Career Training, and education, provides the organisation with the necessary pool of leaders and commanders at all levels. Collective Training allows military personnel to use their individual, crew, specialist and career training together, to develop integrated and coherent combat forces.

The scheduling of training in the Defence Forces, including the Reserve, is underpinned by an analysis of training required to meet operational output and capability development requirements. A long term strategy is adopted with current planning horizons set out to 2021.

The Defence Forces seek to constantly benchmark training across all three arms of the organisation against best military and academic practice. Military best practice is ensured by implementing a policy of standardisation that is in line with EU and NATO/Partnership for Peace partners. Academic best practice is ensured by benchmarking courses through accreditation under the National Framework of Qualifications which is validated by Quality and Qualifications Ireland. The Defence Forces deliver military programmes and modules meeting national and international standards and engage with external educational institutions in order to facilitate organisational learning. This engagement with national and international educational institutions, military and civilian, aims to ensure that the Defence Forces retain currency with regards to best international practice and employ all relevant modern training methods.

I remain committed to ensuring that the personnel of the Defence Forces continue to be trained to appropriate standards.

Defence Forces Equipment

95. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the extent to which military equipment, including transport, communications and procedures, in the Army continues to be upgraded and improved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40314/18]

104. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he is satisfied that facilities such as advanced training, state-of-the-art technology and specific military

equipment is available throughout the Defence Forces with a view to ensuring a competence to deal with national or international security incidents; if he is satisfied that the Defence Forces have adequate liaison with other defence forces throughout Europe in the context of a potential threat to national security; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40323/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 95 and 104 together.

My priority as Minister with Responsibility for Defence is to ensure that the operational capability of the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service is maintained to the greatest extent possible to enable the Defence Forces to carry out their roles as assigned by Government as set out on the White Paper on Defence.

The acquisition of new equipment for the Defence Forces remains a clear focus for me. Future equipment priorities for the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service are considered in the context of the White Paper on Defence as part of the capability development and equipment priorities planning process. The principal aim over the period of the White Paper will be to replace and upgrade, as required, existing capabilities in order to retain a flexible response for a wide range of operational requirements, including response to security risks and other emergencies, both at home and overseas.

Defence Forces military equipment including transport vehicles, aircraft and vessels are kept under ongoing review and where necessary are upgraded to ensure the highest level of force protection and capabilities are available to personnel. Modern secure communications are essential for operations at home and on overseas missions and in that regard Defence Force personnel are suitably equipped with required communications and global positioning systems equipment.

The full spectrum of Defence Forces personnel and a wide range of military equipment are available for deployment in response to any security and other emergencies that may arise. In addition, the Defence Forces keep their operational plans and response capabilities for dealing with a wide range of threats under constant review.

With regard to training, the primary function of training and education in the Defence Forces is to develop and maintain the necessary capabilities. The Defence Forces deliver military training programmes and modules meeting national, EU and international standards. They also engage with external educational institutions in order to facilitate organisational learning. This engagement with national and international educational institutions, civil and military, aims to ensure that the Defence Forces retain currency with regards to best international practice and employ all relevant modern training methods.

Furthermore, Ireland's engagement with Partnership for Peace has provided the Defence Forces access to NATO standards, which are internationally-recognised as representing best practice for the development of military capabilities. Participation in Partnership for Peace is fundamental to Ireland being able to meet its obligations in providing professional peacekeepers for international crisis management and peacekeeping operations mandated by the UN. Ireland's involvement in Partnership for Peace is focused on enhancing interoperability and familiarity with operating procedures in a multi-national environment and is but one means by which the Defence Forces liaise with other European Defence Forces on matters of mutual interest.

I am satisfied that the current provisions, together with the courses of action in the White Paper, will continue to ensure that the Defence Forces is suitably equipped and trained, in line with EU and international best practice, to fulfil all roles assigned by Government.

Defence Forces Strength

96. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the total strength of the Defence Forces, including reserves, Army, Naval Service and Air Corps; the number of women in each branch of the services; the likelihood of recruitment and replacements following retirements now and over the next five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40315/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The total strength of the Defence Forces including reserves is approximately 10,900 of which it is estimated that as of the end of September 9,000 are members of the Permanent Defence Force. The table below sets out the number of women within the Defence Forces:

-	Females (WTE)
Army	483
Air Corps	32
Naval Service	67
First Line Reserve	26
Army Reserve	234*
Naval Service Reserve	19*

WTE - Whole Time Equivalent

*** - Effective Personnel**

There have been further inductions in September 2018 with 215 personnel joining the PDF that month.

The 2015 White Paper on Defence commits to maintaining the strength of the PDF at 9,500 personnel. In order to achieve this target, 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, a competition for DF School of Music instrumentalists and the 2018 RDF recruitment campaigns all took place in the first half of this year and the applications from these various competitions are currently being progressed.

In addition, the Defence Forces Medical Corps are currently accepting applications from suitably qualified medical doctors and psychiatrists and the Naval Service has a number of opportunities for Bridge Watch-keeping Officers (Operations Branch), Marine Engineering Officers and Electrical Engineer Officers.

Arising from the general service recruitment campaign held earlier this year, new recruits will be inducted between September and December. The 95th Cadet Class of 85 recruits was inducted on the 24th September.

A second general service recruitment campaign was launched on 10 September 2018 and will close on 7 October 2018. This will provide recruits for Q1/Q2 of 2019.

As of 25 September 2018, 414 personnel have been inducted and inductions will continue for the rest of the year. Final figures for numbers enlisted in 2018 will not be available until after year's end, although it is expected that similar figures to 2017 enlistments will be achieved.

With the support of the Chief of Staff I am committed to ensuring that there is on-going recruitment to the Defence Forces and that the Permanent Defence Force can continue to operate effectively across all roles assigned by Government, both at home and overseas.

Question No. 97 answered with Question No. 94.

Defence Forces Reserve Strength

98. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the extent to which membership of the local Defence Forces continues to be maintained at a required level; the extent to which ongoing training standards and requirements are met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40317/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The White Paper on Defence provides for a combined establishment of 4,169 personnel for the Army Reserve and Naval Service Reserve (inclusive of the proposal to increase the Naval Service Reserve establishment from 200 to 300 personnel). I am aware of the shortfall between this figure and the current combined strength of the Army Reserve and Naval Service Reserve which, as of 31st August 2018, is 1,745 effective personnel.

To address this difference, I directed the military authorities to maximise recruitment to the Army Reserve and the Naval Service Reserve, having regard to training demands arising from significant ongoing recruitment to the PDF. To date, in 2018, 124 personnel were inducted to the RDF.

A total of 1,364 applications, were received for the 2018 RDF General Service Recruitment campaign. Applications for this recruitment campaign, which ran between 23 April and 4 June 2018, are currently being processed.

In terms of ongoing training standards for the Reserve, the White Paper sets out a developmental path for the organisation. On a day to day basis, the Reserve undertakes training in preparation to assist the PDF, when required. Training across all three arms of the Defence Forces is constantly benchmarked against best military and academic practice. Training procedures are constantly reviewed in order to ensure that the men and women of Oglagh na hÉireann are fully prepared to meet the challenges of the ever changing security environment.

With regard to RDF training, for the current year, Subhead A.5 provides for a budget of €2.15 million of which €2.068 million is allocated for Paid Training Mandays for members of the Reserve. This allocation provides seven days annual paid training for all effective members of the Reserve, fourteen days paid training for all additional personnel recruited to the Reserve in 2018 and provides for career and specialist courses for selected members of the Reserve in line with Reserve priorities. This provision is sufficient having regard to the existing strength of the RDF and the voluntary nature of Reserve training.

I would like to assure the Deputy that I remain committed to the ongoing development of the RDF within the framework set out in the White Paper on Defence.

Emergency Planning

99. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the extent to which the Defence Forces are adequately equipped to deal with emergencies in respect of which they may be called upon; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40318/18]

100. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the extent to which the Defence Forces can be mobilised in the event of natural disasters, including flooding, in view of the preferability of early deployment and the need for the use of specified equipment in such situations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40319/18]

106. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the extent to which specialist skills in dealing with security threats remain available to the Army, Naval Service and Air Corps; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40325/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 99, 100 and 106 together.

In accordance with the Framework for Major Emergency Management, primary responsibility for responding to emergencies caused by severe weather events, such as storms and flooding, rests with the three designated principal response agencies, namely, the relevant Local Authority, An Garda Síochána, and the Health Service Executive. The Defence Forces provide the fullest possible assistance to the appropriate Lead Department in the event of a natural disaster or emergency situation in its Aid to the Civil Authority role.

At National level, representation on the Government Task Force on Emergency Planning, by both the Department of Defence and the Defence Forces, ensures the fullest coordination and cooperation in the event of an emergency and that the command structure within the Defence Forces is compatible with the requirements in this area.

Major Emergency Plans have been developed by local and regional authorities and these Plans identify the procedures for requesting assistance from the Defence Forces.

The Defence Forces retain a wide range of specialist skills which can be deployed in such circumstances, including for a natural disaster or terrorist incidents. The Operations Directorate in Defence Forces Headquarters manages the necessary cross-service coordination in responding to both emergency and security issues. These arrangements have proved effective in all emergencies encountered to date.

With regard to security threats, primary responsibility for the internal security of the State rests with the Department of Justice and Equality and An Garda Síochána. 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 provide assistance and support to An Garda Síochána when requested to do so.

There is ongoing and close liaison between An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces regarding security matters, including ATCP deployments and a wide variety of military training activities are specifically designed to counter or respond to possible security emergencies. Regular coordination and liaison meetings also take place between the Defence Forces and An Garda Síochána in relation to ATCP issues.

In relation to the Naval Service, all vessels are multi-tasked in the sense that, in addition to their fishery protection role, they also undertake general surveillance, security, pollution monitoring, and Search and Rescue in support to the Irish Coast Guard, amongst other duties while on patrol. These activities assist in detecting and preventing emergency situations throughout Ireland's maritime jurisdiction.

The role of the Air Corps includes the provision of an emergency inter-hospital Air Ambulance service in support of the HSE. It is also supporting the HSE in an emergency aeromedical support service operating primarily in the West of Ireland. The Air Corps also has a maritime surveillance function undertaken by its maritime patrol aircraft and both it and the Naval Ser-

vice provide support to the Irish Coast Guard in maritime Search and Rescue operations.

The full spectrum of Defence Forces personnel and equipment are available for deployment in response to any security and other emergencies that may arise. Within the Defence Forces, both the Ordnance Corps and the Army Ranger Wing specialise in providing an immediate response to emergency incidents that might require their highly specialised capabilities. The role of the Defence Forces in these situations is dependent on the nature of the incident and the type of assistance requested.

I can confirm that the Defence Forces keep their operational plans and response capabilities for dealing with a wide range of threats under constant review. It is my priority as Minister with responsibility for Defence to ensure that the operational capacity of the Defence Forces is maintained to the greatest extent possible to enable the Defence Forces to carry out their roles both at home and overseas.

Defence Forces Operations

101. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the extent to which the Air Corps and the Naval Service continue to co-operate in air and sea rescue missions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40320/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Defence Organisation provides a broad range of services in accordance with its primary security role while it also undertakes a diverse range of non security related tasks.

With reference to Search and Rescue, since 2004 the Irish Coast Guard has overall responsibility for the provision of Search and Rescue services within the Irish Search and Rescue region. Both the Naval Service and the Air Corps provide support to the Irish Coast Guard in maritime Search and Rescue operations on an “as available” basis. A Service Level Agreement is in place setting out their roles and responsibilities in this regard.

The Defence Organisation will continue to provide support, as available, to the Irish Coast Guard in respect of Coast Guard Search and Rescue operations.

Defence Forces Recruitment

102. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the extent to which young unemployed persons have been able to join the Defence Forces; if a specific programme exists in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40321/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Defence Forces accept applications from all individuals who meet the requisite criteria for the various competitions that are advertised. There is no specific advertising or recruitment aimed at those who are unemployed. The Defence Forces require men and women from all backgrounds that possess a strong sense of duty, enjoy working as part of a team, and are looking for a rewarding yet challenging career.

The White Paper on Defence committed the Government to putting in place a new employment support scheme with the direct involvement of the Defence Forces. This was not intended to induct young unemployed personnel into the Defence Forces.

The objective of the employment support scheme, which involves a 10 week training pro-

gramme, is to help to develop a path to economic independence for participants, aged between 18 and 24 years, who are at a serious disadvantage owing to their current socio-economic situation. It is designed with the specific aim of equipping participants with life and other marketable and certifiable skills which will assist them both in their capacity to participate fully in society as well as their ability to enter the workforce and or to pursue further education for this purpose.

Defence Forces

103. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he expects to be in a position to augment deficiencies in the Defence Forces in the context of a terrorist attack; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40322/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Primary responsibility for the internal security of the State rests with the Department of Justice and Equality and An Garda Síochána. 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 provide assistance and support to An Garda Síochána when requested to do so. The Defence Forces retains a wide range of specialist skills which can be deployed in such circumstances, including for terrorist incidents.

There is ongoing and close liaison between An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces regarding security matters, including ATCP deployments and a wide variety of military training activities are specifically designed to counter or respond to possible security emergencies. Regular coordination and liaison meetings also take place between the Defence Forces and An Garda Síochána in relation to ATCP issues.

The full spectrum of Defence Forces personnel and equipment are available for deployment in response to any security and other emergencies that may arise. Within the Defence Forces, both the Ordnance Corps and the Army Ranger Wing specialise in providing an immediate response to emergency incidents that might require their highly specialised capabilities.

The Ordnance Corps consists of a number of Explosive Ordnance Disposal teams which are on standby 24/7 to respond when a request for assistance is received from An Garda Síochána to deal with suspect devices.

The Army Ranger Wing is an integral unit of the Defence Forces whose roles include provision of specialist ATCP support to An Garda Síochána. The need for a high level of preparedness to deal with any requests for Special Forces operations is inherent in the unit's mission. Members are trained to the highest levels of motivation, physical fitness and skill at arms for their specialist role. The ARW is on standby 24/7 to be called upon to undertake duties in any part of the country. I can confirm that the Defence Forces keep their operational plans and response capabilities for dealing with a wide range of threats under constant review. It is my priority as Minister with responsibility for Defence to ensure that the operational capacity of the Defence Forces is maintained to the greatest extent possible, and I work closely with the Chief of Staff to this end.

Question No. 104 answered with Question No. 95.

Air Corps Equipment

105. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the extent to which the Air Corps is adequately equipped to detect and-or intercept activity posing a threat to national security; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40324/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Air Corps is not tasked or equipped to monitor aircraft overflying the entirety of Irish airspace. However, on a routine basis, the Air Corps monitors and communicates with foreign military aircraft where such aircraft are flying in the airspace in the vicinity of Casement Aerodrome, Baldonnell, where air traffic control is provided by the Defence Forces.

The Government's White Paper on Defence (2015) provides the defence policy framework over a ten year planning horizon. This includes provision for periodic updates to consider progress with implementation and any revisions required. As stated in the White Paper, should additional funding beyond that required to maintain existing Air Corps' capabilities become available, the development of a radar surveillance capability for the Air Corps is a priority. Funding for this is not provided in the current resource envelope and any future decisions in this regard will be in the context of the ongoing security environment and any associated developments.

The Air Corps' existing Pilatus PC9 aircraft provide a very limited air to air and air to ground intercept capacity. Whilst the development of a more capable air combat intercept capability will be considered as part of the White Paper update, at this stage there are no plans in this regard. However, these matters are kept under constant review.

Question No. 106 answered with Question No. 99.

Rapid Response Initiative

107. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the percentage of applications received from females in respect of the rapid response roster recruitment; the percentage of female applicants deemed successful; the percentage of the successful overall applicants at first stage of recruitment; and the number of those that have not been a member of the rapid response roster previously. [40148/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): Under Ireland's Rapid Response Initiative, highly skilled and experience 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 recruitment process for the Rapid Response roster was carried out this year. The requirements and format of 2018 selection process were set out in the Information Booklet accompanying the call for applications:

197 applications were received by the deadline of 16 May, 2018.

65 applications (33%) were received from female applicants and 132 (67%) from male applicants.

85 applicants were shortlisted and interviewed - 24 female (28%) and 61 male (72%),

The interview process resulted in the appointment of 69 applicants to the Rapid Response roster. 22 (32%) of the successful applicants were female and the remaining 47 (68%) male.

None of the applicants in the 2018 application round indicated in their applications that they had previously served as members of the Rapid Response Corps.

Humanitarian Aid

108. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he is satisfied that the humanitarian needs of refugees in the Mediterranean will be met in view of the loss of a ship (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40149/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The number of irregular arrivals to the European Union have fallen by over 90% this year since their peak in 2015. But, while the overall number of deaths at sea in the Mediterranean has dropped significantly, 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 in the Mediterranean.

In addition, Ireland has provided humanitarian assistance in solidarity with other Member States on three separate occasions over the summer by making pledges to take migrants who were rescued in the Mediterranean Sea (including migrants from the vessel in question) and to process their applications for international protection.

Ireland also supports measures to address the root causes of irregular migration, through humanitarian and developmental programmes in developing countries. Indeed, Ireland’s pledge of €15 million for the EU’s Trust Fund for Africa is the third highest *per capita* contribution by an EU Member State.

Middle East Issues

109. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if compensation will be sought for the demolition of EU-funded aid structures in Palestine by Israel; if compensation will be systematically demanded each time a structure is demolished; and if he will raise this matter at EU level at the earliest opportunity. [40150/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The demolition by Israel of structures belonging to inhabitants of occupied territory, including both Palestinian Territory and the Golan, is in almost all cases illegal under international law. This includes structures provided by the EU or its Member States as humanitarian relief, in the form of emergency shelters for people or animals, schools, and structures for water and power supply, such as water tanks and solar panels.

Ireland is a member of the West Bank Protection Consortium, currently comprising nine EU members plus the ECHO Directorate General of the European Commission, which deals with humanitarian relief. Since late 2017, Consortium donors have sought compensation or restitution for structures funded by the Consortium or its members which have been demolished or confiscated. To date, there have been three such requests for compensation. Israeli authorities have replied that these structures had no planning permission, while ignoring their own systematic refusal to grant such permission to local communities.

The purpose of this action is to highlight the unacceptability of these practices, and to seek restitution for the loss to European taxpayers. The principle rather than the money was the main

focus of the action.

I believe that it is right that the EU and its Member States should consistently seek compensation from Israel for the demolition or confiscation of such structures. My officials have pressed for this at EU level. However, there is not yet agreement among EU members to do so.

Human Rights

110. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on the implementation of the recommendations of the Myanmar fact finding mission; his views on UNSC referring Myanmar to the International Criminal Court; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40226/18]

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.

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.

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.

I have taken note of the recommendations and Ireland is actively engaging with our international partners in responding to its findings.

One of the key issues we have focused on so far is the issue of accountability. At the recent 39th Session of the Human Rights Council, Ireland actively supported the creation of a resolution on Myanmar, proposed jointly by the EU and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, which mandates a new impartial independent mechanism to collect, consolidate, preserve and analyse evidence of the most serious violations of international law committed in Myanmar since 2011. This is an important step in facilitating fair and independent criminal proceedings for these crimes.

The IIFFM report also makes a number of other recommendations. In particular, the report recommends the introduction of targeted sanctions against members of the Tatmadaw and Border Guard Police who have been accused of violations of international law. Ireland has actively engaged in the formation of the EU’s position in the most recent EU Foreign Affairs Council’s Conclusions on Myanmar, which were adopted on 26 February 2018. These Conclusions, which in some ways anticipated the outcome of the IIFFM, provide for the imposition of targeted measures against certain persons from the Myanmar Armed Forces and Border Guard Police responsible for serious human rights violations, and for the expansion of the existing

arms embargo. A number of members of the Tatmadaw and Border Guards have been listed under these sanctions since the Conclusions were adopted in February. Ireland is actively engaging in further discussions in this regard in light of the findings of the IIFFM.

Another of the key recommendations of the IIFFM relates to the question of repatriation. Ireland strongly supports the IIFFM's insistence that provisions be made for a safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable means of return of the Rohingya to Rakhine State and for the introduction of measures that will enable them to sustain a reasonable livelihood. The question of citizenship is central in this regard and I call on the authorities of Myanmar comprehensively address this issue.

Additionally, it is clear that the long-standing drivers of conflict in Myanmar need to be addressed. The IIFFM recognises that the implementation of the findings of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State (The Annan Commission) provides a roadmap for sustainable and community-led peacebuilding in Rakhine State, and for the development of extremely impoverished regions there. Ireland has strongly and repeatedly supported the implementation of the report of the Advisory Commission's findings and will continue to do so.

On the question of the referral of Myanmar to the International Criminal Court, Ireland is not currently a member of the UN Security Council, and is therefore not in a position to formally offer support on the question of referral.

However, having considered the evidence of the IIFFM, Ireland would support the referral by the Security Council of the situation in Myanmar to the ICC. The Security Council is the only competent body that can take this step.

Given the political and legal difficulties that surround such a referral, our focus in ensuring accountability and investigation of the allegations is necessarily elsewhere. As already outlined, we are working closely with international partners in other fora including the UN Human Rights Council and the EU to ensure that measures are put in place to allow the investigation of human rights violations and that those who have perpetrated these crimes are held to account.

Officials in my Department will continue to monitor the situation and to work with our international partners to urge progress within Myanmar on these difficult issues and to pursue a resolution to this crisis that brings peace, reconciliation and prosperity for everybody in Myanmar. In the meantime, Ireland will continue to support the provision of humanitarian aid to those in need.

Dublin-Monaghan Bombings

111. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the outcome of the most recent discussions he had with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the British foreign Secretary regarding the need for the British Government to respond positively and without further delay to the unanimous requests of Dáil Éireann to provide access to papers and files pertaining to the Dublin and Monaghan bombings of 1974; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40277/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Dealing with long-outstanding issues relating to the legacy of the conflict in Northern Ireland are of the utmost importance to the Government. The implementation of the All-Party Dáil motions relating to the Dublin and Monaghan bombings is a priority for the Government, as highlighted in the Programme for a Partnership Government.

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

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

I am engaged with the British Government on an ongoing basis on this issue, as are officials from my Department.

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

Officials from my Department and the Department of Justice and Equality met with Justice for the Forgotten on 4 July to hear their further views on the implementation of the legacy framework provided for under the Stormont House Agreement. My Department also facilitated an engagement on 29 August in Dublin for the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Victims and Survivors, Judith Thompson, to hear the views of victims and survivors in this jurisdiction, including the families affected by the Dublin and Monaghan bombings and other attacks, in the context of the British Government's ongoing consultation on draft UK legislation to establish the Stormont House Agreement legacy bodies.

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

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

VAT Rebates

112. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 154 of 25 September 2018, if he will address a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40286/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Parliamentary Question No. 154 of September 2018 asked if unregistered farmers can claim back V.A.T. on sensor lighting for farm security. I advised at the time that The Value Added Tax (Refund of Tax) (No 25) Order, 1993 provides for a refund of VAT incurred by unregistered farmers in the "construction, extension, alteration or reconstruction of any building or structure which is designed for use solely or mainly in his or her farming business". The installation of security lighting would not of itself qualify for a refund of VAT under this Order but would qualify where it is a constituent element of qualifying construction work undertaken by an unregistered farmer. I further advised that each claim for a refund of VAT under this Order is evaluated on its merits.

A VAT refund could only arise where the supply of sensor lighting is made as part of the construction, extension, alteration or reconstruction of any building or structure which is designed for use solely or mainly in his or her farming business. In other words, if it is a stand-alone supply of lighting or where it is not part of a broader construction, extension, alteration or reconstruction supply, a VAT refund will not be allowed. Each case is examined on its merits and a decision is made on a case by case basis.

There were 21,227 claims made in 2017 under The Value Added Tax (Refund of Tax) (No 25) Order, 1993 by 16,475 unregistered farmers.

Tax Exemptions

113. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Finance if the exemption threshold for children on inheritance tax will be increased in budget 2019. [40131/18]

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

Budget 2019

114. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance if a series of matters relating to tourism initiatives (details supplied) will be considered in budget 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40162/18]

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.

Budget 2019

115. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance if a series of matters relating to tax equity and support for micro-businesses (details supplied) will be considered in budget 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40163/18]

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 may or may not be the subject of Budget decisions. However, I should point out that PRSI policy is a matter in the first instance for my colleague the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

Insurance Costs

116. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Finance the measures taken to meet and engage with insurance companies regarding excessive premiums being charged to consumers, particularly in counties Cavan and Monaghan. [40257/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As Minister for Finance, I am respon-

sible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation. Neither I nor the Central Bank can interfere in the pricing of insurance products, as these matters are of a commercial nature, and are determined by insurance companies based on the risks they are willing to accept.

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

Indeed, the problem of rising motor insurance premiums was the main impetus for the establishment of the Cost of Insurance Working Group, which is now chaired by the Minister of State for Financial Services and Insurance, Mr. Michael D'Arcy T.D. Its *Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance* was published in January 2017. The Report makes 33 recommendations with 71 associated actions to be carried out in agreed timeframes, set out within an Action Plan. The Working Group continued its work throughout 2017 and subsequently published the *Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance* in January 2018.

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

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

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

Pension Provisions

117. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to change the AMRF or ARF schemes in budget 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40294/18]

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 may or may not be the subject of Budget decisions.

However, the Government is currently reviewing the Pensions system more generally, as set out in *A Roadmap for Pensions Reform 2018–2023* published last February.

Insurance Coverage

118. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Finance if he is satisfied that a person (details supplied) who had obtained mortgage approval and was subsequently refused life assurance from four life assurance providers here due to a mental health condition from which they recovered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40326/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As Minister for Finance, I am respon-

sible 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 that they should apply to particular categories of individuals, nor am I in a position to direct them to provide cover to such individuals.

It is my understanding that insurers use a combination of rating factors in making their individual decisions on whether to offer mortgage protection cover and what terms to apply. These factors can include age, health, family medical history, occupation and lifestyle. In addition, these may be determined or linked to the length of time with which such a policy may last. In the case of mortgage protection policy, such policies tend to be over a much longer term, for example, 25 years or over the lifetime of the mortgage repayment schedule. Furthermore, my understanding is that insurers do not all use the same combination of rating factors, and as a result prices and availability of cover varies across the market, and that they will price in accordance with their own past claims experience.

I am unable to comment on specific cases, like the one provided. However you should note that my officials contacted Insurance Ireland recently with regard to a similar case and they advised that applicants for any type of life assurance will be asked on the application form detailed health questions and that insurers may request one or more of the following in addition: a report from the applicant's GP; an independent medical examination; or other medical tests. On the basis of the information provided, the application is considered individually and the decision on whether to offer cover and on what terms depends on the facts of that particular case.

Finally, I would note that Insurance Ireland operates a free Insurance Information Service for those who have queries, complaints or difficulties in relation to obtaining insurance. Insurance Ireland can be contacted at feedback@insuranceireland.eu or 01-6761914.

Motor Insurance Costs

119. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Finance the status of efforts to reduce the cost of car insurance; the number of recommendations and associated actions that have been completed to date (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40330/18]

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

However, it is acknowledged that pricing in the motor insurance sector has been subject to a lot of volatility in recent years and, indeed, the problem of rising motor insurance premiums was the main impetus for the establishment of the Cost of Insurance Working Group. Its *Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance* was published in January 2017. The Report makes 33 recommendations with 71 associated actions to be carried out in agreed timeframes, set out within an Action Plan. There is also a commitment that the Working Group will prepare quarterly updates on its progress.

The sixth quarterly update was published by the Working Group on 30th August 2018. It shows that, in total, of the 56 separate applicable deadlines within the Action Plan set to the end of Q2 2018, 44 relate to actions which have now been completed. Substantial work has also been undertaken in respect of the nine action points categorised as “ongoing”.

It is envisaged that the implementation of all the recommendations cumulatively, with the appropriate levels of commitment and cooperation from all relevant stakeholders, should achieve the objectives of delivering fairer premiums for consumers and a more stable and competitive insurance market.

In this regard, it should be noted that the most recent CSO data (for August 2018) indicates that private motor insurance premiums have decreased by over 20% since peaking in July 2016. While the CSO statistics indicate a greater degree of stability on an overall basis, these figures represent a broad average and therefore I appreciate many people may still be seeing increases. However, I am hopeful that the improved stability in pricing will be maintained and that premiums should continue to fall from the very high levels of mid-2016.

Finally, it may be of interest to the Deputy’s constituents that the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission website has an informative section regarding the purchase of car insurance – <https://www.ccpc.ie/consumers/money/insurance/car-insurance/> - and one of the key tips listed to help cut costs is to “shop around” and “always get quotes from several insurance providers when you need to get or renew insurance”.

Garda Station Refurbishment

120. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the timeline for the upgrading of the Garda station in Newcastlewest, County Limerick (details supplied). [40139/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The procurement of an external design team for the development of Newcastle West Garda Station is currently being progressed with tender documentation at an advanced stage of preparation. It is expected that tender competitions will commence via the EU journal shortly and that a full design team will be in place by early next year with the necessary works in terms of design development, planning and tender documentation completed by the end of that year. The construction works will be tendered via the EU journal and following award of a contract, are expected to take 18 months to complete.

Garda Stations

121. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the construction works at the new Bailieborough Garda station; the completion date for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40194/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): A Planning Application for this development commenced on 31 August 2018, under Part 9 of the Planning and Development Regulations. The period of public consultation ended on 11 September 2018. It is expected that this process will be concluded shortly.

At this point in time it is not possible to give a definitive completion date for the construction of the new Station until i) the Planning process, ii) the required Public Procurement process

and iii) Contract Award are complete.

Equality Proofing of Budgets

122. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will address matters raised by an organisation (details supplied) in relation to Budget 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40128/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The ongoing work regarding Equality Budgeting in Ireland follows the Programme for a Partnership Government commitment to ‘develop the process of budget and policy proofing as a means of advancing equality, reducing poverty and strengthening economic and social rights’. The National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020 also contains a related commitment.

A pilot programme of equality budgeting was introduced for the 2018 budgetary cycle, anchored in the existing performance budgeting framework. The intention is to embed an equality perspective throughout the budgetary process with a whole of year budgetary focus; equality budgeting is not to be seen as something separate from the budget process. For this first cycle of equality budgeting, a number of diverse policy areas were selected with associated objectives and indicators published in the Revised Estimates Volume (REV) 2018 in December last. Progress towards achieving these targets was reported on in the Public Service Performance Report 2017, published in April.

Learnings from the pilot approach are being used to expand the initiative to other expenditure programmes and equality dimensions for the 2019 budgetary cycle. To further guide the roll-out of equality budgeting an Equality Budgeting Expert Advisory Group has been established of which the National Women’s Council are a member. This group is comprised of a broad range of relevant stakeholders and policy experts to provide advice on the most effective way to advance equality budgeting policy and progress the initiative. I expect to return to the question of Equality Budgeting in the broad context of Budget 2019 and in the Revised Estimates for 2019, including in light of the matters which the Deputy has highlighted.

Legislative Measures

123. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when the compulsory retirement age for civil servants will be extended; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40189/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I refer the Deputy to my answer to PQ 37374/18 on the 18/09/2018.

Data Centres

124. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the rationale for the State building its own data centre in Backweston, County Kildare; the estimated cost of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40192/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): While most Government departments and Public Sector bodies are using or planning to use the Public Cloud for the delivery of services, it is envisaged that there will always be a requirement for

on-site hosting of some of our more sensitive data. In this respect, Ireland is no different to the other countries in the EU.

Where we do need to host systems and data on-site, it is beholden upon us to do so in the most cost and energy efficient and secure way. This is best achieved by replacing the plethora of computer rooms and aging data centres with a highly energy-efficient and secure solution utilising the best of modern data centre technologies to minimise carbon emissions.

Consequently, the Government plans to build a new data centre in Backweston, County Kildare and over time retire the existing suite of computer rooms and data centres that exist.

A business case has been developed for the new data centre, however, due to the commercial sensitive nature of this project the OPW, are not obliged to release this information at the current time.

Papal Visit

125. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the cost to the State of the visit of Pope Francis. [40197/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The overall final cost of the Papal Visit is not available as yet.

The Office of Public Works continues to work on the post visit logistical arrangements which includes the de-rig, reinstatement and post-event administration for venues and locations associated with the visit including Áras 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.

SOLAS Administration

126. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a person (details supplied) will receive a college place as part of a course; the reason for the delay in this case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40181/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): This is an operational matter for SOLAS, who manage this apprenticeship programme. I have asked SOLAS to contact the Deputy directly in relation to the matter.

Schools Building Projects Status

127. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a school building project for a school (details supplied); the position on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40141/18]

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

In the context of progressing the building project, my Department has undertaken a site visit

to the school and the schedule of accommodation and project brief is currently being devised. My Department will liaise directly with the school authority on completion of this process.

Education and Training Boards Staff

128. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the level of overtime being worked by support staff in the City of Dublin Education and Training Board, CDETB; his plans to recruit staff to minimise the overtime being worked; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40167/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I understand from the Deputy that the support staff referred to are non-teaching staff based in colleges of further education employed in CDETB.

The position is that ETBs receives an administration & maintenance staffing allocation from my Department. The way in which such staffing is allocated to individual ETB schools, colleges and other activities within the CDETB is entirely a matter for that ETB.

ETBs are afforded considerable flexibility in the use of these resources to meet the needs of individual schemes and the way in which the allocation is distributed among schools and colleges and other activities is a matter for each ETB in line with its priorities and perceptions of need.

Request for additional non-teaching staffing supports are dealt with on a case by case basis and are decided upon in accordance with the criteria set down in deciding on supports for ETB schools, colleges and other activities.

In many cases, it has not always been possible to sanction staff to ETBs where the staff sought is outside the criteria laid down by my Department. In deciding on these criteria, I must be prudent in the context of ongoing budgetary pressures.

Schools Building Projects Status

129. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a school extension (details supplied) will commence construction; if this will be expedited in view of the circumstances in the school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40172/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The major building project referred to by the Deputy is at an advanced stage of architectural planning Stage 2b (Detailed Design), which includes the application for statutory approvals and the preparation of tender documents. All statutory approvals have been secured.

The Stage 2(b) submission has been reviewed by the Department and comments were issued to the school and its Design Team. My Department requested confirmations from the Design Team that it carries out *one final review* of all of its tender documentation to ensure compliance with DoES requirements. The Design Team has been requested to submit written confirmation from each Design Team member including the PSDP that they have completed this review and are satisfied that the Tender Documents are complete, correct and in compliance with DoES and Building Control (Amendment) Regulations (BC(A)R) tender documentation requirements. A response is awaited.

In order to expedite this project, the Department, on 17th September 2018, authorised the

school and its design team to commence the pre-qualification process to select a shortlist of contractors for this project. Pre-qualification normally takes between 8 and 12 weeks to complete.

When the pre-qualification process is complete and the requested confirmations have been received, 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.

Teachers' Remuneration

130. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if provisions will be made in budget 2019 in order to address pay inequality in teaching by ensuring that the lower salaries of teachers who qualified post-2011 are rectified. [40173/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The public service agreements have allowed a programme of pay restoration for public servants to start. I negotiated, together with my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, a 15-22% pay increase for new teachers.

As a result of these changes, from 1 October 2018 the starting salary of a teacher will be €36,318, and from 1 October 2020 onwards will be €37,692.

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

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

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

On Monday 24th September, I welcomed, together with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, the outcome of discussions between public service employers and the public services committee of ICTU in respect of new entrant pay.

This agreement will benefit 16,000 teachers and nearly 5,000 SNAs within the education sector. The deal provides for a series of incremental jumps for new entrants at points 4 and 8 of their scale.

For example, a teachers hired in September 2011 would see their salary increase from €45,200 in September 2018 to €53,062 in September 2020 under the PSSA agreement and the recent outcome of the new entrant pay talks.

Teachers' Remuneration

131. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an award that was issued to national school principals in 2009 will issue immediately; and if the findings of the recent review by the PSSA will be published. [40174/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In the second report of the Public Service Benchmarking Body (issued in December 2007), the Body recommended pay increases for 15 grades, including changes to the allowance payable to Principals of primary schools and of small post-primary schools.

This measure was not implemented due to the State's worsening financial circumstances. Implementation of recommendations of the Benchmarking Body are a public service wide issue and as such are a matter for the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. In line with current Government policy, there are no plans to implement the recommendations set out in the second report of the Public Service Benchmarking Body as they apply to any public servant.

The Government has agreed that Principal allowances, which were reduced under the FEM-PI legislation, will be restored to their previous levels in 2020.

The public service agreements including the PSSA have allowed a programme of pay restoration for public servants to start. I negotiated, together with my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, a 15-22% pay increase for new teachers.

As a result of these changes, from 1 October 2018 the starting salary of a teacher will be €36,318, and from 1 October 2020 onwards will be €37,692.

On Monday 24th September, I welcomed, together with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, the outcome of discussions between public service employers and the public services committee of ICTU in respect of new entrant pay.

This agreement will benefit 16,000 teachers including principals and nearly 5,000 SNAs within the education sector. The deal provides for a series of incremental jumps for new entrants at points 4 and 8 of their scale.

Schools Administration

132. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to introduce one release day per week for teaching principals in order to carry out administrative work. [40175/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): 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 has provided 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.

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 current school year. This measure will assist teaching principals to more effectively plan their release days for the benefit of the school.

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

School Staff

133. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the restoration of posts of responsibility in a greater number of larger primary schools will be considered. [40176/18]

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

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

The lifting of the moratorium is an initial phase in the restoration of middle management posts and any future improvements to the number of posts allocated will be dependent on budgetary demands.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

134. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he is taking in order to reduce primary school class sizes further and bring them into line with the European average. [40177/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Budget 2018 marked the second year of major reinvestment in the education sector, as we continued to implement the Action Plan for Education, which has the central aim to make the Irish education and training service the best in Europe by 2026.

Budget 2018 provided for an additional 1280 teaching posts in the 2018/19 school year. This includes a one point improvement in the staffing schedule in primary schools which brings the position to the most favourable ever seen at primary level.

The latest figures in relation to pupil teacher ratios show an improved ratio of teachers to students from 16:1 to 15.3:1 at primary level when comparing the 2015/16 school year to the 2017/18 school year. Average class sizes at primary level improved from 24.9 to 24.5 in the same period.

Each 1 point adjustment to the primary staffing schedule is estimated to cost in the region of €16.5m per annum. Any additional improvement would have to be considered as part of the

next annual budgetary process, alongside the many other demands from the education sector.

Teacher Supply

135. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if regional teaching panels will be established in order to assist in covering substitutable days. [40178/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Earlier this year I established the Teacher Supply Steering Group, which is chaired by the Secretary General of my Department. The Group is considering the issues that relate to 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 is supported by a number of working groups which are looking in more detail at the issues under these broad headings. The matter of supply panels to cover substitute vacancies is part of that consideration. In addition, officials of my Department are engaging directly with the teacher unions. As part of that engagement, the supply panel issue was the subject of an initial discussion with INTO and it is intended to have a follow up meeting on the matter with the union in the near future.

Capitation Grants

136. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the consideration he has given to the costings included in an organisation's (details supplied) pre-budget 2019 submissions; and his views on whether capitation grants need to be increased in line with rising day to day costs such as inflated insurance premiums. [40179/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am aware of the pre-Budget 2019 submission referred to by the Deputy and can confirm that while it would cost approximately €17.6 million to restore capitation to pre-2011 levels for Primary Schools, the overall cost of restoring capitation funding for all sectors is circa €35.6 million.

However, I do recognise the need to improve capitation funding for schools having regard to the reductions that were necessary over recent years. Restoring capitation funding as resources permit is one of the actions included in the Action Plan for Education and I remain committed to achieving this. However, I must be prudent in the context of ongoing budgetary pressures and prioritise where it is not possible to do everything that I would like to do in the education sector in any one year.

In 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.

Budget 2018 marked the second year of major reinvestment in the education sector, as we continue to implement the Action Plan for Education, which has the central aim to make the Irish Education and Training service the best in Europe within a decade.

In 2018, the budget for the Department of Education increased by €554 million to over €10 billion. Through budget 2017 and Budget 2018, we are now investing €1 billion more in education.

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

Responsibility for procurement of insurance and payment of same rests with Boards of Management 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 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. Schools Procurement Unit which has a national remit is available to advise and assist schools in relation to procurement matters.

Oideachas Riachtanas Speisialta

137. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna an bhfuil i gceist duine a ainmniú ar an gComhairle Náisiúnta um Oideachas Speisialta a dhéanadh ionadaíocht d'earnáil an oideachais lán-Ghaeilge agus Gaeltachta; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [40184/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Tá tús curtha leis an bpróiseas chun comhaltaí de chuid Chomhairle Náisiúnta um oideachas Speisialta nua a cheapadh/a athcheapadh do 2019 go 2022.

Beidh Cathaoirleach agus 12 ghnáthchomhalta ar an gComhairle Náisiúnta um oideachas Speisialta, 6 fear ar a laghad agus 6 mban ar a laghad.

Ceapfar comhaltaí Chomhairle Náisiúnta um Oideachas Speisialta faoi Alt 21 d'Acht EPSEN (An tAcht do Dhaoine a bhfuil Riachtanais Speisialta Oideachais Acu), 2004 agus faoi na Treoirlínte maidir le Ceapachán do Bhoird Stáit 2014.

Éilítear le hAcht EPSEN go mbeidh spéis nó eolas ar leith ag gach Ball den Chomhairle a bhaineann le hoideachas leanaí a bhfuil riachtanais speisialta oideachais acu.

Déantar foráil le hAlt 21 d'Acht EPSEN go gceapfaidh an tAire na daoine a leanas:

- Comhalta amháin arna ainmniú ag an Aire Sláinte,

- Beirt chomhaltaí arna n-ainmniú ag an Údarás Náisiúnta Míchumais agus

- Tar éis dul i gcomhairle le páirtithe leasmhara ábhartha ar nós Eagraíochtaí Aitheanta Bainistíochta Scoile, Ceardchumann Aitheanta agus Cumainn na mBall Foirne a dhéanann ionadaíocht do mhúinteoirí agus do Chumann Náisiúnta Tuismitheoirí, féadfaidh an tAire suas le ceathrar Ball a cheapadh má mheasann sé gur cuí é sin a dhéanamh.

Soláthraíonn an tAcht freisin go ndéanfaidh an tAire seisear comhaltaí de Chomhairle Náisiúnta um Oideachas Speisialta a cheapadh go díreach, i gcomhréir leis na *Treoirlínte maidir le Ceapachán do Bhoird Stáit 2014*. De ghnáth, ceanglaítear sna treoirlínte gur cheart baill na mBord Stáit a roghnú faoi phróiseas ceapacháin faoin tSeirbhís um Cheapacháin Phoiblí, faoi réir eisceachtaí atá leagtha amach faoi Alt 9 de na Treoirlínte.

Is iad a leanas na heisceachtaí atá ábhartha don phróiseas ceapacháin reatha:

- leagtar síos sa reachtaíocht meicníocht shonrach chun folúntais a líonadh ar Bhord Stáit. (sa chás seo Alt 21 de EPSÉN)

- tá an tAire ag ceapadh oifigeach óna Roinn.

- féadfar comhaltaí a athcheapadh don dara téarma i gcás go mbíonn an tAire sásta tar éis dó dul i gcomhairle leis an gCathaoirleach gur léirigh an comhalta Boird sin a (h)éifeachtúlacht agus a rannchuidiú mar bhall de Bhord an Stáit lena ndearbhaítear a (h)athcheapadh.

Tugadh cuireadh do na Páirithe Leasmhara ábhartha uile, lena n-áirítear ionadaithe ó earnáil an oideachais lán-Ghaeilge agus Gaeltachta, beirt ainmnithe (bean amháin agus fear amháin) a ainmniú de réir cheanglais Alt 21 d'Acht EPSÉN.

Tosóidh próiseas go gairid le roinnt ainmnithe a roghnú faoin tSeirbhís um Cheapacháin Phoiblí. Tá sé oscailte do dhaoine aonair iarratas a dhéanamh trí phróiseas na Seirbhíse um Cheapacháin Phoiblí, más mian leo go ndéanfaí iad a mheas mar ainmniúchán agus le ceapadh ar an gComhairle Náisiúnta um Oideachas Speisialta.

Ar chríochnú an phróisis chun ainmnithe a roghnú, ceapfaidh mé Comhairle Náisiúnta um oideachas Speisialta nua le haghaidh mhí Eanáir 2019.

School Services Staff

138. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to ensure that school secretaries have greater job security in addition to sick pay and pension entitlements. [40205/18]

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.

School Transport Provision

139. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if school transport will be provided for a person (details supplied). [40210/18]

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.

Bus Éireann has advised that the child referred to by the Deputy commenced on a school transport service last week.

Adult Education Provision

140. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he will take to secure a funding increase on the amount allocated (details supplied) for adult literacy provision in 2016 in advance of budget 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40211/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): Overall funding for further education and training (FET) will be determined through the estimates process for Budget 2019. It should be noted that funding for FET is allocated to SOLAS, who then allocate to the education and training boards (ETBs) through a strategic planning process. There is some discretion for SOLAS and the ETBs in relation to how funding is allocated across all of the FET programmes, including adult literacy.

Historically there has been insufficient focus on the basic skills of people who are in employment. I recently launched a new policy framework for employee development, 'Supporting Working Lives and Enterprise Growth in Ireland'. This sets a target of having over 40,000 workers, whose skills level is below Level 5 on the National Framework of Qualifications, engaged in state supported skills development by 2021. This will supplement the numbers already being supported through our adult literacy programmes.

School Services Staff

141. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when provisions will

be put in place to ensure secretaries in schools are given a pay deal that will include a proper wage, pension rights and sick pay. [40213/18]

142. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason secretaries are not employed by his Department but by the individual board of management of each school. [40214/18]

143. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason school secretaries are being paid from the schools' ancillary grants in view of the fact that the situation could arise that two secretaries in the same town could be paid considerably different amounts depending on the amount that school can afford to pay. [40215/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 141 to 143, inclusive, together.

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 the pay of capitation grant-funded 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:

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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.

144. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason the State Examinations Commission had to hire non-teachers in 2018 to mark leaving certificate exam papers; if he is satisfied that there has been no deterioration in the quality of the marking of these papers; the number of appeals submitted in 2018 following the checking of the papers by exam students; the number of appeals submitted in each of the past three years; the number of successful appeals in the past three years; the types of errors discovered following successful rechecks; if more than one person is involved in the initial marking of the exam papers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40221/18]

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.

Teachers' Remuneration

145. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the measures he is introducing to end the pay inequality between newly qualified teachers and more experienced teachers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40230/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The public service agreements have allowed a programme of pay restoration for public servants to start. I negotiated, together with my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, a 15-22% pay increase for new teachers.

As a result of these changes, from 1 October 2018 the starting salary of a teacher will be €36,318, and from 1 October 2020 onwards will be €37,692.

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

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

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

On Monday 24th September, I welcomed, together with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, the outcome of discussions between public service employers and the public services committee of ICTU in respect of new entrant pay.

This agreement will benefit 16,000 teachers and nearly 5,000 SNAs within the education sector. The deal provides for a series of incremental jumps for new entrants at points 4 and 8 of their scale.

For example, a teachers hired in September 2011 would see their salary increase from €45,200 in September 2018 to €53,062 in September 2020 under the PSSA agreement and the recent outcome of the new entrant pay talks.

Schools Building Projects Status

146. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40231/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that works commenced on site for the school building project in question in June 2018. The project is expected to take approximately 27 months to complete.

Schools Building Projects Status

147. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a project (details supplied); when a meeting will take place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40264/18]

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 who is Patron of the school.

The Stage 1 stakeholders meeting was scheduled to take place in the Department's offices in December, 2017. This meeting was cancelled at the request of the Patron.

My Department is meeting with the ETB shortly to discuss the progression of a range of projects including the project in question.

School Accommodation Provision

148. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding additional funding for a project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40275/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school to which the Deputy refers was approved funding for an Additional Accommodation Scheme project in April 2018. My Department has not received any subsequent application from the school seeking an increase in the funding approved. The School Authority should submit details of the circumstances giving rise to the increased costs supported by a report from the Design Consultant appointed by the School Authority for the purposes of this project. This should be sent to my Department's Devolved Projects Section along with a request for increased funding as required. This application will then be evaluated and a decision will be communicated directly to the school authority.

Budget 2019

149. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will address matters raised by an organisation (details supplied) in relation to budget 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40128/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): It is not the practice to disclose information of this kind in advance of the Budget Statement and publication of the Estimates of Public Expenditure which will take place next week.

Gambling Sector

150. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the interdepartmental working group on gambling report will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40151/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): The Deputy will be aware that the Government, on 10 January 2018, approved a number of proposals from myself to update and modernise the earlier proposals set out in the 2013 General Scheme of the Gambling Control Bill. A significant amount of work has been undertaken within Government to develop revised proposals which better reflect the required extent of the State's engagement with the modern Irish gambling environment which is operating with both domestic and international aspects.

In particular, the Government approved a proposal to establish an independent regulatory authority for the gambling industry in Ireland. This decision reflected the view that such a body would be best placed to conduct the complex range of licensing, regulating, monitoring, inspecting and enforcement tasks, etc., of the growing gambling industry in all of its facets. The development of an independent regulatory approach would also mirror the approach now taken in most EU Member States and beyond.

I chaired the Interdepartmental Working Group on Gambling, comprising all stakeholder Departments and the Office of the Attorney General that met on 5 occasions between February and June of this year to review all provisions of the 2013 General Scheme of the Gambling Control Bill and to consider other relevant matters. The Group is currently preparing its Report, which it intends to submit to Government as soon as possible.

Criminal Prosecutions Data

151. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 321 of 10 July 2018, the status of the information sought (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40153/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As I previously advised the Deputy, my Department has already requested a report on this matter from the Garda authorities, however this report has not yet been received.

I can assure the Deputy that my Department is actively following up on this request with An Garda Síochána and as soon as the report is to hand I will contact the Deputy directly with an update.

Immigration Data

152. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 299 of 10 July 2018, if the information sought is now available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40154/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have been informed by An Garda Síochána that an examination of relevant records indicates that in the past four years no person has been refused a permission to enter the State on the basis of the provisions of section 4(3)(c) of the Immigration Act 2004, which relates to non-nationals suffering from a condition set out in the First Schedule of the Act.

Immigration Policy

153. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when he plans to introduce the new regularisation scheme for persons who came here as international students between January 2005 and December 2010 and are now undocumented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40216/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Officials of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department are currently finalising the details of a response to the matter raised by the Deputy.

I expect to announce details of this response in the next few weeks.

Crime Levels

154. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of thefts of vehicles in the Cork city policing division in each of the years 2013 to 2017. [40295/18]

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. I have asked the CSO to forward the available statistics in relation to the information requested directly to the Deputy.

Garda Overtime

155. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of hours of overtime by gardaí in 2017, by division. [40296/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Under the Garda Síochána Act 2005, the Garda Commissioner is the Accounting Officer for the Garda Vote and is responsible for the effective and efficient use of the resources at his disposal. Moreover, under the Act, the Commissioner is responsible for directing and controlling and for carrying on and managing generally the administration and business of An Garda Síochána.

Allocation of Garda resources are a matter for the Commissioner, in light of his identified operational demands. The arrangements for Garda overtime are not a matter for which I, as

Minister, have responsibility.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that in total, the overtime hours for the organisation in 2017 amounted to 3,682,442. This calculation of hours includes briefing time, in addition to all other types of overtime, including overtime expended on specific operations such as Operation Thor, Organised Crime Operations, Port Security Operations and the visit to Ireland of the Prince of Wales.

I am advised by Garda authorities that for operational reasons, it is not possible to provide the breakdown by Division as requested by the Deputy.

More generally, I can inform the Deputy that I have already discussed the Garda financial position with Commissioner Harris. We are agreed that it is essential that value for money is achieved with the significant resources at his disposal.

I am satisfied that Garda management is acutely aware of the need to utilise the resources being made available to them in the most efficient and effective manner to ensure high visibility policing in our communities. Under the governance and oversight arrangements in place between my Department and An Garda Síochána, the evolution of Garda expenditure is kept under review and there is regular structured engagement in relation to resources, including overtime, between An Garda Síochána and other relevant parties including my Department, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Policing Authority.

Apprenticeship Programmes

156. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the reason for the delay in apprentices obtaining college places that are an intrinsic part of their courses, particularly in view of the shortage of skilled trade persons; the steps she plans to take to rectify this matter; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40180/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department does not hold policy responsibility for the Apprenticeship system. Policy responsibility for the system lies with the Department of Education and Skills and the Apprenticeship Council. Operational responsibility in this area lies with Solas, Ireland's further education and training authority. My Department supports the development of the apprenticeship system on an ongoing basis as a means of providing for the broad range of skills needed for the growing economy.

IDA Ireland Data

157. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the most recent occasion on which the IDA visited counties Cavan, Monaghan and Meath; the number of new jobs that have been created by the IDA in the past 12 months; the steps it is taking to attract companies to the counties; the success it has had with the strategy for the counties; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40232/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): IDA Ireland continues to highlight the benefits of expanding or locating in all of our regions, including in Counties Cavan, Monaghan and Meath. There are over 122,000 people employed across 649 firms in IDA client companies located outside of Dublin, with 45% of all new foreign direct investment (FDI) jobs created last year based in regional locations.

Employment numbers for 2018 will not be available until my Department's Annual Employment Survey is carried out in November 2018. Site visits are collated by the IDA on a county-by-county basis only and are released every quarter. Information on the number of site visits on particular dates to specific locations is therefore unavailable. Last year, IDA client companies conducted three site visits to County Meath, two site visits to County Cavan, one site visit to County Monaghan. The trend for site visits this year are positive with four site visits to County Meath, one visit to County Cavan and one site visit to County Monaghan as of the second quarter of 2018. Site visit activity, however, does not necessarily reflect investment potential, as at least 70% of all new FDI comes from existing IDA client companies.

IDA Ireland is working hard to promote Counties Cavan, Monaghan and Meath to potential investors. The Agency has a dedicated regional manager for the North East/North West Region and has an office in the Cavan Innovation and Technology Centre. As part of its strategy to encourage investment to the area, it is focusing on sectors including agri-food, manufacturing, tourism and internationally traded services. County Meath is being actively marketed by the IDA as a location for second sites for multinationals in the Dublin region, with a focus on building clusters in existing sectors like high-value manufacturing and international services.

The IDA also regularly engages with key stakeholders on the ground in Cavan, Monaghan and Meath, including with local authorities, public bodies, the education sector and companies from both its own client base but also from the indigenous sector. IDA Ireland also owns sites in all three counties that are being actively marketed to its clients.

It is important to emphasise that FDI only forms one part of investment in regional locations. Indigenous enterprise is responsible for a significant portion of employment growth, especially outside Dublin. My Department and all its agencies, including Enterprise Ireland and the LEOs, work together constantly and collaboratively to ensure that jobs and investment are spread as fairly as possible across this country.

I am pleased to say that Enterprise Ireland (EI) supported companies employed 5,451 people in Cavan and 5,366 people Monaghan in 2017. This is an increase of approximately 4% in both counties compared to 2016. Total employment in EI supported companies in County Meath now stands at 7,302, an increase of over 4% compared to the previous year. In May of this year, EI facilitated a meeting of Local Enterprise Office (LEO) and EI engineering companies from Meath and Cavan with a view to creating an engineering cluster in the region.

Companies supported by the Cavan LEO employed a total of 1,252 people in 2017, representing a net increase of 100 jobs over the previous year. The Monaghan LEO employed 1,052 people in 2017, representing a net increase of 142 jobs over the previous year. The Meath LEO employed 1,112 people in 2017, which is a net increase of 162 jobs over the previous year. These numbers clearly reflect the growing domestic industries which are so important to these counties.

We recognise that there is room for improvement in Cavan, Monaghan and Meath and we are working hard, across Government, to further unlock the economic potential of these counties. The Enterprise Agencies under my remit will continue to engage with their clients, and with one another, to create jobs and source new investment for these regions.

Action Plan for Online Safety

158. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take under the Action Plan for Online Safety to remove harmful material relating to bogus cures for autism and in

order to prevent further material of this nature from being posted online. [40166/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The Action Plan on Online Safety, launched by An Taoiseach on 11 July last, recognises that online safety is not the responsibility of any one Department, but that many Departments have a role to play. The Action Plan sets out 25 Actions and Departments responsible for their respective delivery. A Sponsors Group has recently been established to drive implementation of the Action Plan. This is chaired by the Department of Education & Skills and comprise five other key Government Departments; Children and Youth Affairs, Justice and Equality; Communications, Climate Action and Environment; Business, Enterprise and Innovation; and Health.

The removal of harmful content will be considered by each Department in the context of this and future plans.

The position in relation to Autism is that under the Medicinal Products (Control of Placing on the Market) Regulations 2007, as amended, a medicine cannot be placed on the market in Ireland unless it has a marketing authorisation from the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) or a community marketing authorisation from the European Medicines Agency (EMA). Any product which makes a medicinal claim to treat medical conditions such as autism is considered to be a medicine and requires an authorisation under this legislation.

Any manufacture, supply or sale of products without authorisation for the purposes of treating a medical condition is illegal.

The Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) is the competent authority for medicines in Ireland. The Authority has an Enforcement section, of which one of its roles is, to investigate potential breaches of medicines legislation and, where necessary, to take corrective action including legal proceedings. This can include investigation into complaints regarding products advertised or marketed as medicinal products but which have no marketing authorisation or certificate of traditional-use registration. HPRA investigations are prioritised on the basis of perceived risk to public health.

Penalties for breaches of regulations are provided for by the Irish Medicines Board Acts 1995 and 2006. On summary conviction, a person may face fines not exceeding a class B fine (€4,000) and, or imprisonment for a term not exceeding one year; on conviction on indictment, fines not exceeding £100,000 and, or imprisonment for a term not exceeding 10 years, and in the case of a second or subsequent offence, fines not exceeding £250,000, and, or imprisonment for a term not exceeding 10 years.

The HPRA monitors the Internet and online platforms for the unauthorised promotion of unauthorised medicines. The HPRA continually engages with the social media platforms to remove any advertisements and offerings by individuals using those sites.

The HPRA continues to advise consumers not to seek to purchase or take unauthorised products and I strongly reiterate this advice.

Departmental Funding

159. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if funding will be provided for a charity (details supplied). [40256/18]

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 Waiting Lists

160. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health the waiting time expected for a cataract operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40127/18]

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 Properties

161. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE estates division will agree to sell the old hospital building in Mohill, County Leitrim, to the owners of the local primary healthcare centre that are seeking to renovate the dilapidated unit for the benefit of the local community; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40130/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the management of the health care property estate, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to you in relation to this matter.

Ambulance Service Response Times

162. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the average response times taken by ambulance crews to respond to all emergency call-outs in County Donegal during August and September 2018; the number of occasions that the time taken to respond exceeded the average response time; the date on which each exceedance occurred; the reason for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40132/18]

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

Blood Donations

163. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the MSM one-year deferral period on blood donation; if further examination has or will be sought by his Department or the IBTS on the matter in the near future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40133/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The IBTS lifted its lifelong ban on men who have sex with men (MSM) from donating blood in January 2017, when the deferral policy was reduced to a period of one year following their last sexual encounter with a man.

The IBTS will continue to keep all deferral policies under active review in the light of scientific evidence, emerging infections and international experience.

Commencement of Legislation

164. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health when he plans to commence Parts 2 and 3 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40134/18]

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 as soon as possible.

National Sexual Health Strategy

165. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the progress made on the National Sexual Health Strategy 2015-2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40135/18]

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 their attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Budget 2019

166. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter regarding budget 2019 requests by an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40137/18]

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.

Health Services Reports

167. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health the status of a HSE working group report on the development of a model of care for lymphoedema and lipoedema; when he expects this report to be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40138/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am advised that the report of the Working Group on a Model of Care for Lymphoedema and Lipoedema Treatment in Ireland is under consideration by the HSE.

The recommendations arising from the report will be considered by my Department once they become available, with a view to progressing implementation by the HSE through the annual service planning process.

Hospital Appointments Status

168. **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. [40143/18]

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

169. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health if there is no working child psychologist in an organisation (details supplied) or child and adolescent mental health, CAMHS, service serving County Mayo; and if maternity cover has not been provided and that there are vacant posts [40145/18]

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 Data

170. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number of vacant child psychologist posts in County Mayo and in CHO 2, respectively; and the length of time these posts have been vacant for [40146/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): 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.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Data

171. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number of children waiting to see a child psychologist in County Mayo and CHO 2, respectively; and the length of time each child has been waiting [40147/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): 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

172. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the status of the case of a person (details supplied); and when the person concerned can expect an appointment with a consultant cardiologist at the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital, Dublin 7 [40155/18]

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 Regulation

173. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the actions he plans to take to deal with the promotion of the illegal and dangerous so-called MMS as a purported cure for autism in view of the fact that these methods are essentially endangering and abusing children; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40157/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Medicinal Products (Control of Placing on the Market) Regulations 2007, as amended, a medicine cannot be placed on the market in Ireland unless it has a marketing authorisation from the Health Products Regula-

tory Authority (HPRA) or a community marketing authorisation from the European Medicines Agency. Any product which makes a medicinal claim to treat medical conditions such as autism is considered to be a medicine, and requires an authorisation under this legislation.

The product referred to as Miracle Mineral Solution (MMS) is not authorised as a medicine for sale or supply in Ireland. Any manufacture, supply or sale of this product for the purposes of treating a medical condition is illegal.

The HPRA is the competent authority for medicines in Ireland. The Authority has an Enforcement section, which is responsible for investigating potential breaches of medicines legislation and, where necessary, taking corrective action, including legal proceedings. This can involve investigation into complaints regarding products advertised or marketed as medicinal products but which have no marketing authorisation or certificate of traditional-use registration. The HPRA's investigations are prioritised on the basis of perceived risk to public health.

The HPRA has taken enforcement actions against the supplier of MMS, resulting in the prosecution and conviction of the person responsible in Ireland for such supply. The HPRA continually monitors online platforms for the promotion and sale of unauthorised medicines, including MMS. The Authority does not, at this time, have evidence of the promotion of MMS on social media or any online website registered in Ireland.

The HPRA continues to advise consumers not to purchase or take MMS.

Hospital Appointments Status

174. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment for surgery. [40164/18]

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 Staff

175. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the way in which a trip was funded for HSE personnel who recently accepted an award (details supplied) in Chicago; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40168/18]

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

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

176. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if the drug Spinraza will be made available to persons who need it; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40171/18]

179. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health his plans to make the Spinraza drug available to persons suffering from the degenerative disease spinal muscular atrophy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40198/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 176 and 179 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.

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.

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.

Ministerial Correspondence

177. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health when a reply will issue to correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40191/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): A reply has now issued to the Minister's Constituency Office and should be with the Minister very shortly.

Pharmacy Regulations

178. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the concerns of the group representing pharmacy assistants arising from new rules drafted under section 30 of the Pharmacy Act 2007; the way in which he plans to address those concerns; if he will sign the statutory instrument giving legal effect to the draft rules; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40196/18]

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, the Council of the PSI considered the proposed draft Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (Temporary Absence of Pharmacist from Pharmacy) Rules 2018 at its meeting on the 20th September 2018 where Council approved the draft rules without amendment.

Correspondence outlining the concerns of registered pharmaceutical assistants has been received by my Department. My role in relation to this process is limited to the consideration of any such Rules once submitted for my approval. I must consider any Rules presented to me from a fair and impartial perspective, without prejudice or prejudgement. This includes consideration of concerns raised by, or on behalf of, registered pharmaceutical assistants.

I await the receipt of the Rules 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.

Question No. 179 answered with Question No. 176.

Patient Safety

180. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to a serious incident of self-harm that occurred in Clontarf Hospital on 9 May 2017; and if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that staff had prior to the event voiced their concern for the well-being of the person and the lack of training and experienced staff in dealing with patients with psychiatric illnesses. [40199/18]

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.

Patient Safety

181. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health if, following the incident of self-harm to a person in Clontarf Hospital, a report on the incident was notified to the HSE, HIQA or An Garda Síochána; if a State agency has investigated the incident; and if there are ongoing

concerns on patient safety at the hospital [40200/18]

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.

Patient Safety

182. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health if he will instruct or recommend that HIQA investigate fully the incident of self-harm at Clontarf Hospital; and if so, if the investigation will ensure that the hospital meets all national guidelines and standards relating to the care of patients with psychiatric illnesses in their care and that the manner in which staff were dealt with by management, including a report that staff were forced under threat of disciplinary action to change their statements regarding this incident, is addressed. [40201/18]

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 Delays

183. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding an audiology assessment and tympanostomy procedure for a person (details supplied), which the medical team has deemed necessary to take place at the same time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40203/18]

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

Physiotherapy Provision

184. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Health if the decision to withdraw physiotherapy services from a school (details supplied) will be reversed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40206/18]

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.

Qualifications Recognition

185. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Health if he will request an organisa-

tion to expedite the degree recognition process in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40207/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a matter relating to the recognition application of an individual health and social care professional, the Health and Social Care Professional Council (CORU), the State regulator in this regard has been asked to respond directly to the Deputy.

Qualifications Recognition

186. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Health the steps he has taken to improve waiting times for the process by which social workers who have qualified in the UK must apply to an organisation (details supplied) in order to have their qualifications recognised before they can start working here and avail of existing job offers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40208/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I wish to assure the Deputy that I am very much aware of the need to ensure that the health services have timely access to the recruitment of health professionals and the efficient registration of new graduates and those seeking recognition of qualifications acquired outside the State.

In accordance with EU and national law, applications for recognition of qualifications acquired outside the State must be completed within four months.

Driven by a number of factors including the improved economic climate and the increasing number of professional registers, the volume of applicants seeking recognition has more than doubled since 2015. In response CORU has allocated additional resources, including additional staff, to ensure that the timelines stipulated by law are met. CORU endeavours to process applications as quickly as possible, however the overarching objective is patient safety and CORU must ensure that each applicant fulfils all of the criteria required for registration.

In line with CORU's strategic objectives and an ongoing programme of improvement, an online system for making applications is currently being tested and finalised. The new system will provide a platform for the receipt and processing of applications, removing the requirement for paper submissions. It is envisaged that this system will be operational in the coming months and will greatly assist both the applicant and CORU in the processing of applications for recognition of qualifications.

Speech and Language Therapy Staff

187. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health when a speech therapist vacancy in County Meath will be filled. [40209/18]

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.

Nursing Staff Contracts

188. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Health the steps being taken in ad-

vance of budget 2019 to improve nursing and midwifery recruitment and retention; the steps being taken to improve annual starting salaries for staff nurses and staff midwives in comparison to those of teachers and healthcare assistants; the steps being taken to ensure that Irish nurse and midwives' average weekly working hours are improved in line with those of their international counterparts; the steps being taken to ensure that Ireland can retain highly trained and skilled nurses and midwives as demand rises around the world due to the global shortage of nurses and midwives; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40217/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Recruitment and retention of nurses remains a priority for this Government.

Last year, the Government concluded an overall Public Service Stability Agreement with public sector unions which sees very significant increases in public service pay, including for nurses. In line with that Agreement, in recent weeks, the Public Service Pay Commission (PSPC) concluded a review in respect of key health service grades, including nurses.

Their report made a number of recommendation which would benefit approx. 18,000 nurses

- Qualification allowance, Location allowance and Dual qualification allowance increased by 20%

- Location allowance to be payable to those working in Maternity services

- Time frame to become a senior staff nurse reduced by 3 years.

Alongside the PSPC Report, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform also reached agreement with ICTU on the 'New Entrant' salary scale, which will benefit 60,000 public servants who entered employment since 2011. This includes about 10,000 nurses. The benefits under the measure will be effective from 1 March 2019 and will be restricted to Parties adhering to the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020.

It is clear that these measures will improve the overall pay package for the majority of nurses and midwives. They show that the Public Service Stability Agreement and the related negotiation process are delivering significant improvements for nurses.

Departmental Funding

189. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Health if an urgent request will be made to the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform to secure funding for an organisation (details supplied) through budget 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40220/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The level of funding for my Department is still being considered as part of the national Estimates and budgetary process for 2019. Pending completion of this process it is not appropriate for me to comment further at this stage.

General Practitioner Services Provision

190. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the procedures whereby a family in an area has no family general practitioner, as the general practices in the area are not taking

on additional patients; the position regarding the HSE allocating a particular general practitioner to the family; if there is a requirement on general practitioners to take up these allocations from the HSE; the period of time this lasts for; if the general practitioner is free to discharge the family from the practitioner's practice after a six-month period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40222/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Where a medical card or GP visit card holder experiences difficulty in finding a GP to accept him/her as a patient, the HSE has the power to assign that person to a GP's GMS patient list where the person has been removed from another GP's list or refused entry onto a GP's list, and the person has unsuccessfully applied to at least three GPs in the area who are contracted to provide services under the GMS scheme.

The assignment of a GMS patient to a GP's list can be reviewed by the HSE on the request of the GP after 6 months from the date of assignment, and, if appropriate, the patient can then be reassigned to an alternative GP.

Persons who do not hold a medical card or GP visit card access GP services on a private basis. GPs are private contractors and issues relating to the acceptance of private patients are a matter of private contract between the clinician and his/her patients. While I have no role in relation to such matters, I would expect clinicians to consider the importance of patients having access to a GP service close to home when deciding whether or not to accept private patients.

Blood Transfusion Service Provision

191. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 147 of 28 February 2018, the status of the pilot programme; if there are results available from the programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40223/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Irish Blood Transfusion Service (IBTS) propose to extend their service for Hereditary Haemochromatosis patients from October through mobile clinics in counties Limerick, Clare, Tipperary and Kerry. It is hoped that this service will be expanded incrementally to other parts of the country.

Hereditary Haemochromatosis patients who attend these mobile IBTS clinics will have their eligibility to donate blood assessed. If they are eligible to be a donor, the IBTS will provide a phlebotomy service for the patient free of charge.

Medical Card Eligibility

192. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Health his plans to approve automatically a medical card to persons who suffer from spinal injuries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40224/18]

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.

Health Services Staff Remuneration

193. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Health his plans to address the restoration of pay in section 39 agencies in advance of budget 2019; his further plans to consider applying the new pay levels retrospectively; if he has costed the restoration of pay, the realignment of incremental scales and the payment of arrears due for all of the section 39 agencies; his views on the possibility of further strike action; his further views on the possibility of a closure of services, in particular respite services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40225/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): You will be aware that in February 2018, an agreement was reached at the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) between 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 in 50 pilot organisations. The 50 organisations included were agreed at the WRC by all parties.

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 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.

I am happy to advise that following constructive engagement with the assistance of the Workplace Relations Commission, an agreement was reached on 2 October between the parties. Pay restoration will commence with an annual pay increase of up to €1,000 in April 2019 for those employed by the 50 organisations involved in the pilot. Any outstanding balance will be paid in two equal amounts in 2020 and 2021. It is recognised that some of the remaining organisations will have pay restoration issues also. A process of engagement to address this will commence in 2019.

Disability Services Provision

194. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of his plans to develop a service (details supplied); his further plans for investment in disability services at this site; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40228/18]

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

195. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the discussions that have taken place with an organisation (details supplied) in respect of setting up a centre in counties Cavan and Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40229/18]

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.

Disability Support Services

196. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health when a group home for persons with disabilities will open in Carrickmacross, County Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40233/18]

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.

Physiotherapy Provision

197. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the reason physiotherapy services have been removed from a school (details supplied); if this decision will be reversed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40240/18]

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.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Review

198. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when the new arrangements will be introduced and if legislation is required to change the rules for the fair deal scheme to introduce a three-year cap on the inclusion of productive assets in the assessment or as part of the assessment for the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40241/18]

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. I hope 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.

HSE Waiting Lists

199. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if he will address the HSE's waiting times for assessments of need for children; the steps he is taking to provide occupational therapy, psychology appointments and speech and language appointments in counties Cavan and Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40244/18]

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.

Occupational Therapy Waiting Lists

200. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the number of children on the

waiting list for occupational therapy in counties Cavan and Monaghan; the length of time each has been waiting; if measures are being introduced to ease the waiting times; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40246/18]

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.

Psychological Services Waiting Lists

201. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the number of children on the waiting list for psychology appointments in counties Cavan and Monaghan; the length of time each has been waiting; if measures are being introduced to ease the waiting times; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40247/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): 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.

Services for People with Disabilities

202. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the number of residential care places in counties Cavan and Monaghan; the number of persons on the waiting list for residential care in the counties; the estimated waiting time and cost per place for residential care in the counties; the way in which these figures compare to other counties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40248/18]

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 Recruitment

203. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if extra professionals will be provided to clear the backlog left following the vacancy of a person (details supplied) in counties Cavan and Monaghan up until May 2018. [40249/18]

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.

Pharmacy Regulations

204. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health his views on the proposed changes in respect of the draft rules on temporary absence by pharmaceutical assistants in view of the fact that he has received a report on this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40250/18]

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, the Council of the PSI considered the proposed draft Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (Temporary Absence of Pharmacist from Pharmacy) Rules 2018 at its meeting on the 20th September 2018 where Council approved the draft rules without amendment.

Correspondence outlining the concerns of registered pharmaceutical assistants has been received by my Department. My role in relation to this process is limited to the consideration of any such Rules once submitted for my approval. I must consider any Rules presented to me from a fair and impartial perspective, without prejudice or prejudgement. This includes consideration of concerns raised by, or on behalf of, registered pharmaceutical assistants.

I await the receipt of the Rules 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.

Emergency Departments

205. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of works planned for a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40255/18]

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 Provision

206. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health the community services being provided to a person (details supplied) by the HSE to assist with medical issues as outlined by the person's general practitioner; and if the matter will be fully investigated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40261/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Status

207. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if an urgent appointment at University Hospital Waterford urology department for a person (details supplied) will be provided. [40262/18]

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 Properties

208. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the HSE's plans for a site (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40278/18]

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.

Hospital Waiting Lists

209. **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. [40279/18]

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.

Pharmacy Regulations

210. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding new rules that will affect a group of health workers (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40284/18]

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, the Council of the PSI considered the proposed draft Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (Temporary Absence of Pharmacist from Pharmacy) Rules 2018 at its meeting on the 20th September 2018 where Council approved the draft rules without amendment.

My role in relation to this process is limited to the consideration of any such Rules once submitted for my approval. 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 and until that time, I am unfortunately not in a position to comment any further on the matter raised.

Proposed Legislation

211. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health the timeline for the publication of the medical guidelines for the termination of pregnancy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40288/18]

212. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health the person or persons responsible for the publication of the medical guidelines for the termination of pregnancy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40289/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 211 and 212 together.

Yesterday I met with key stakeholders, including the Medical Colleges, to discuss the Bill and the operation of the service for termination of pregnancy.

The development of clinical guidelines on termination of pregnancy is the responsibility of the professional groups concerned.

I acknowledge the importance of the ongoing work in preparation for the implementation of the service and look forward to the time when women who face a crisis pregnancy will be able to access a termination close to home and supported by those who care about them.

Hospital Beds Data

213. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of beds and wards in all public and voluntary acute hospitals that were closed on 28 September 2018 or the latest date on which data for validated bed closures at hospital and ward level are available, in tabular form. [40331/18]

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 Discharges

214. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of bed days lost through delayed discharges in each public and voluntary hospital to date in 2018, in tabular form. [40332/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Deputy will be aware, Minister Daly has established a Working Group to undertake an independent expert review of delayed discharges, which can impact on patient flow and Emergency Department performance, with the objective of reducing delayed discharges and ensuring that patients are cared for in the most appropriate setting. This Group is due to report back to him shortly.

In relation to the particular query raised by the Deputy, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Ambulance Service Response Times

215. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the percentage of clinical status 1 ECHO incidents responded to by a first responder in seven minutes and 59 seconds or less; and the percentage of clinical status 1 DELTA incidents responded to by a patient-carrying

vehicle in seven minutes and 59 seconds or less by ambulance station in each month in 2018 to August or latest date available. [40333/18]

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

Ambulance Service Data

216. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide statistical information (details supplied) regarding vehicles associated with the National Ambulance Service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40334/18]

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

Ambulance Service Data

217. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of emergency ambulances in service by the year they entered service; the number between pods and vehicles in terms of the date they entered service and the HSE region in which they are based; the number of intermediate care ambulances currently in service by the year they entered service; the number by pods and vehicles in terms of the date they entered service; the HSE region in which they are based, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40335/18]

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

Ambulance Service Data

218. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the distances that have been travelled by emergency ambulances, intermediate care ambulances and rapid response vehicles in service in such a capacity, respectively by HSE region and subdivided by every 50,000 miles or 80,000 kilometres; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40336/18]

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

Emergency Departments Waiting Times

219. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons aged 75 years of age or over who experienced an emergency department wait time more than 24 hours to date in 2018; and the hospitals in which the wait occurred [40337/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the query raised by the Deputy is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Home Care Packages Data

220. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of home care packages being provided in each local health office, LHO, area. [40338/18]

221. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the waiting list for a home care package in each LHO area; and the number waiting zero to three, three to six, six to 12 and 12 months plus, respectively. [40339/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 220 and 221 together.

As these are a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Ambulance Service Data

222. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of ambulance attendances at each emergency department nationwide in April 2018; the number of such ambulances that waited longer than 20, 40, 60, 90, 120 and 180 minutes to hand over patients, get their trolleys back and return to responding to calls, respectively in tabular form [40340/18]

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

Hospitals Data

223. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of operations and procedures that were cancelled or postponed in each public hospital to date in 2018 in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40341/18]

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

224. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of operations and procedures that were cancelled or postponed in each voluntary hospital to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40342/18]

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.

Transfer of Entitlements

225. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps that will be taken to ensure that the process of a person (details supplied) leasing entitlements to another party, which appears to be in order in respect of both the lessor and lessee, will be processed without delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40123/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): This transfer

of entitlements by lease has been processed. Both parties were notified in writing of the successful transfer of the entitlements on 27 September 2018.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Applications

226. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment under the 2018 areas of natural constraint will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Galway; the reason for the delay in issuing this payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40124/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An application under the 2018 Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) Scheme was received from the person named on 2 April 2018.

Under 2018 Area of Natural Constraint Scheme, all eligible applicants are required to have met a minimum stocking density of 0.15 livestock units for a retention period of seven consecutive months, in addition to maintaining an annual average of 0.15 livestock units calculated over the twelve months of the scheme year. Stocking density can be satisfied by cattle, sheep, goats, deer and equines. My Department's records confirm that, while the person named had stock on his holding in 2018, he has failed to meet the minimum stocking density of 0.15 livestock units per hectare required for a period of seven consecutive months.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

227. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when advance areas of natural constraint and basic scheme payments will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40142/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An application under the 2018 Basic Payments (BPS) and Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) Schemes was received from the person named on 15 May 2018.

Payment under the ANC scheme issued to the nominated bank account of the person named on 28 September 2018.

Advance payment under the Basic Payments Scheme are scheduled to commence on 16 October 2018 in respect of all cases that have been cleared for payment at that stage.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

228. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when advance areas of natural constraint and basic scheme payments will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40169/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An application under the 2018 Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) scheme was received from the person named on 26 March 2018.

Under 2018 Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme, all eligible applicants are required to have met a minimum stocking density of 0.15 livestock units for a retention period of seven consecu-

tive months, in addition to maintaining an annual average of 0.15 livestock units calculated over the twelve months of the scheme year. Stocking density can be satisfied by cattle, sheep, goats, deer and equines.

While the holding of the person named has been confirmed as having satisfied the seven month retention period, it has not as yet satisfied the annual average requirement. Cases such as this are reviewed regularly and as soon as it is confirmed that this applicant has met these requirements, the case will be further processed, with a view to payment issuing at the earliest possible date thereafter, provided all other Scheme requirements have been satisfied.

GLAS Data

229. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of commonages that have not been allocated to planners under the GLAS scheme; the number of farmers affected; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40182/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): All GLAS commonages have been allocated to a GLAS Commonage Adviser.

Commonage Management Plans are a core requirement for participants with a commonage action, within the GLAS scheme. I would encourage any GLAS applicant with outstanding obligations, including the finalisation of a Commonage Management Plan to speak to their Commonage Adviser and ensure that this work is completed as a priority. Without the submission of all the required information, these applicants will remain ineligible for further GLAS payments.

GLAS Data

230. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of commonage framework plans that have not been submitted to his Department; the number of farmers whose GLAS payments are held up as a result; the steps he plans to take in order to ensure they are provided, in view of the fact that it was his Department that selected the planners to do this work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40183/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Commonage Management Plans are a requirement for participants with a commonage action, within the GLAS scheme. The GLAS requirement for commonages less than 10 hectares is the submission of an individual Commonage Framework Plan (CFP) prepared by the individual participants GLAS Adviser. There are currently 332 Commonage Framework Plans to be finalised involving 247 GLAS participants.

GLAS participants with outstanding CFPs have been contacted directly to contact their Advisers to ensure their plans are submitted immediately. The Department has also written to all GLAS Advisers with outstanding CFPs. I would encourage any GLAS applicant with outstanding obligations, including the finalisation of a Commonage Framework Plan to speak to their Adviser and ensure that this work is completed as a priority. Without the submission of all the required information, these applicants will remain ineligible for further GLAS payments.

Scéim Comhshaoil Talmhaíochta Carbóin Glas Íseal

231. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Talmhaíochta, Bia agus Mara cén uair a

íocfar an fuilleach den deontas GLAS do 2017 le duine (sonraí tugtha); cén fáth a bhfuil moill leis an íocaíocht; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [40185/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Ceadaíodh an duine ainmnithe isteach in GLAS 3 agus an 1 Eanáir 2017 an dáta ar cuireadh tús leis an gconradh. Tá an réamhíocaíocht faighte ag an té sin i leith 2017 lena n-áirítear GLAS plus.

Tuigim nár cuireadh an duine atá ainmnithe san áireamh sa Phlean Bainistíochta Coimíneachta a cuireadh ar aghaidh dá choimíneacht. Tá Oifigigh na Roinne ag obair ar réiteach le go mbeidh an Comhairleoir Coimíneachta ábalta an duine atá ainmnithe a chur leis an bPlean seo. Ba cheart go mbeadh fáil air seo go luath. Bhí oifigigh na Roinne i dteagmháil leis an gComhairleoir Coimíneachta chun an staid a chur in iúl dó.

Fodder Crisis

232. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the possibility of introducing a low-cost loan scheme at the European investment loan rate of 1.5% will be examined in order to support farmers who have had to expend significant funds to source and transport fodder and feed as a result of severe weather conditions (details supplied) in 2018 and reduced prices for produce; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40234/18]

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 last year's Budget 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 the current situation. Therefore, I have also welcomed recent initiatives by co-ops in relation to credit facilities for their suppliers.

Fodder Crisis

233. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he

will consider introducing a subsidy for a high-fibre concentrate feed to mitigate the guaranteed fodder shortage in winter 2018 following the severe spring snowstorm and summer drought in 2018; the steps he has taken to examine all available risk management tools to determine which supports are most appropriate to the farming sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40235/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I would like to give the Deputy a full background and account of some of the actions and measures I have put in place to meet the challenges of recent weather events. 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 around replenishing depleted stocks of fodder. I requested the group to co-ordinate advice on managing grazing and fodder conservation through the subsequent extended period of extraordinarily dry weather.

Following a meeting with Commissioner Hogan I secured agreement 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.

Furthermore on the 3rd August last I announced a €2.75 million Fodder Production Incentive for Tillage Farmers to encourage tillage growers to actively engage in the fodder market. This additional funding commitment aims to incentivise a doubling of the area currently under catch crops.

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. While the measure will operate through the Co-operatives/registered importers, the actual beneficiaries will be farmers who need supplies of fodder.

As the recent weather events have shown, farmers require access to measures that improve their capacity to respond to these occurrences and in this connection 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.

I am confident 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 and I have no plans to introduce a subsidy for a high-fibre concentrate feed. I can also assure you that I will continue to closely monitor and engage on this significant challenge during this difficult period.

Fodder Crisis

234. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will examine the possibility of reintroducing the fodder transport subsidy to assist farmers in transporting fodder which will be in demand due to the impending winter 2018 shortage following the severe spring snow and summer drought; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40236/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): 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 ad-

visory messages to farmers around replenishing depleted stocks of fodder. I also requested the group to co-ordinate advice on managing grazing and fodder conservation through the subsequent extended period of extraordinarily dry weather. Fodder surveys conducted by Teagasc at my request as part of the group's work identified a substantial deficit in national fodder stocks, identified at 18% in June and falling to 12% in September.

Therefore my overall priority was to support the conservation of as much fodder for the coming Winter as possible when the opportunity to do so arose and to supplement this with necessary imports as required.

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 and there has been positive engagement with this measure. This additional funding generated significant additional forage area currently under catch crops.

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. While the measure will operate through the Co-operatives/registered importers, the actual beneficiaries will be farmers who need supplies of fodder.

Additionally, I also secured agreement from Commissioner Hogan 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 am confident 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 and ensure adequate supplies ahead of the coming winter. I have no plans to introduce a national fodder transport subsidy. However I can assure you that I will continue to closely monitor and engage on this significant challenge during the coming period.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Review

235. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the areas of natural constraint, ANC, review with regard to redesignation using a set list of biophysical criteria; if the new approach must be introduced from January 2019; if mapping of all ANC lands has been completed; the actions that have been completed to date by officials; the actions that remain outstanding; the timeframe for remaining actions; when the final ANC data will be submitted to the European Commission in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40237/18]

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

My Department has commenced work on this project, and relevant technical experts are currently working on analysing the data in relation to the new biophysical criteria. This process has involved ongoing engagement with the Joint Research Centre, and a number of iterations

of data have been submitted and discussed with them. This is the standard approach across Member States.

In addition to the technical work on the biophysical criteria, the Regulation allows for two linked processes designed to enable further targeting of support under the Scheme. These processes are called fine tuning and the identification of areas of specific constraint. These three processes are well underway and being examined in parallel to each other and, once complete, will provide the basis for the identification of eligible areas in the ANC scheme from 2019 onwards.

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

Veterinary Laboratories

236. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the review and cost-benefit analysis of the regional veterinary lab in County Kilkenny, which serves the farmers of the entire region of the south east; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40238/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department has commissioned a cost-benefit analysis (CBA) of options that have been proposed for the future development of the Regional Veterinary Laboratories (RVLs). The team conducting the CBA includes internationally-recognised, independent experts in economic analysis and animal disease surveillance. It is currently finalising its work, after which a report and recommendations will be presented to me.

My Department completed an initial consultative process with all relevant stakeholders on the options for the RVLs during the course of last year and the consultants undertaking the CBA have also consulted with stakeholders. Any decision that is made on the RVLs will be informed by both those consultative processes and the outcome of the CBA.

Sheep Welfare Scheme

237. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the possibility of increasing the €10 subsidy cap per ewe under the sheep welfare scheme will be examined in advance of budget 2019 in view of the underspend of €5 million in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40239/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Sheep Welfare Scheme was introduced in December 2016 to contribute to the continuing viability and sustainability of the sheep sector in Ireland. The Scheme is funded through Ireland's Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014 - 2020 and it complements the range of other RDP supports available to sheep farmers under schemes such as GLAS, TAMS, Knowledge Transfer and the Areas of Natural Constraint scheme.

The details of the Sheep Welfare Scheme, including the amount of payment to participants, were approved by the European Commission in 2016. The payment rates are based on the

agreed costings underlying the actions to be undertaken in the scheme, and any increase in the funding allocated to existing actions would thus require changes to the actions currently being undertaken by farmers, or the addition of new actions. Any such changes to the details of the scheme would require the agreement of the European Commission via the formal Rural Development Programme amendment process.

Suckler Welfare Scheme Payments

238. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on increasing the payments under the suckler cow scheme from the current low level to a much more sustainable level in view of the decrease in the number of suckler cows here in recent years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40242/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): 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.

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.

Examination of appropriate measures to support all agrifood sectors, including the suckler sector, 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.

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.

TB Eradication Scheme

239. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding the TB forum; the funding he expects to provide for the programme to eliminate TB; the amount of extra funding expected to be required for this task over the coming years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40243/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the first meeting of the TB Forum was held on 5th September 2018. It was attended by a wide range of stakeholders from the agrifood sector and the Chairman, Mr Michael Cronin has informed me that the establishment of the Forum was welcomed by all.

In relation to funding, clearly over the next 10-12 years our expectation is that together we will build on the significant progress in reducing TB incidence that has been made over recent times and that over the time period very significant savings and benefits to farmers, stakeholders generally and to the economy as a whole will accrue.

I will consider all evidence based policy proposals from the Forum that relate to the overall objective of eradication of TB by 2030. As outlined in the Terms of Reference, I request that any such proposals respect the principles outlined in the National Farmed Animal Health Strategy, which includes reflecting costs and benefits.

Any recommendations emanating from the Forum that involve likely or potential increases in expenditure, will be considered on merit along with any and all other recommendations, bearing in mind the ultimate goal of eradication of TB by 2030.

Knowledge Transfer Programme

240. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to problems with issued knowledge transfer payments, particularly for partnership farms; the steps he will take to rectify the situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40251/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Knowledge Transfer (KT) is one of a suite of measures included under the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 and involves the formation of knowledge transfer groups across the beef, dairy, equine, sheep, tillage and poultry sectors. Farmer participants attend group meetings and produce a Farm Improvement Plan in consultation with their KT Facilitator. For each year of the three year programme participants receive a reimbursement in the amount of €750 for a primary sector and €375 for a secondary sector where all requirements of the programme have been met.

Payments for Year One of the knowledge transfer (KT) programme commenced in late October 2017.

In the initial stages of the payment phase for this programme an issue arose in relation to participants who were in Registered Farm Partnerships. This issue related to the requirement to match the data in the Farm Improvement Plan to the individual farmer participants in the Registered Farm Partnerships. Officials in my Department have since rectified this issue.

To date, over 18,780 out of approximately 19,100 farmer payments, amounting to approximately €12.3m, have issued across all 6 KT Sectors. Work is ongoing to clear outstanding cases.

Fodder Crisis

241. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of applications that have been received from counties Cavan and Monaghan and nationally under the fodder transport scheme in tabular form. [40252/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): A total of 610 applications have been received under the Fodder Transport Support Measure of which 19 were received from County Cavan and 2 were received from County Monaghan. The full county breakdown is set out below.

Payments under the Measure commenced on Tuesday 17 July.

Fodder Transport Support Measure

County	Number of Applicants
Cavan	19
Clare	51
Cork	211
Donegal	52
Galway	28
Kerry	47
Kildare	2
Kilkenny	1
Leitrim	20
Limerick	14
Longford	2
Louth	2
Mayo	20
Meath	3
Monaghan	2
Offaly	4
Roscommon	31
Sligo	16
Tipperary	82
Waterford	1
Westmeath	2
Total	610

Brexit Supports

242. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps being taken to protect farmers in Border counties from a hard Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40253/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Brexit has the potential to have a very significant impact on farmers and on the agri-food sector throughout Ireland, including farmers in the border counties.

As the Deputy will be aware, the agri-food sector is of critical importance to the Irish economy, and its regional spread means it underpins the socio-economic development of rural Ireland in particular.

In the first instance, the Government is seeking to minimise the impact of Brexit through a negotiated outcome which permits trade along the border regions to continue without impediment. In this regard, the UK commitment, in the Joint EU-UK Report of last December, to

avoid a hard border on the island of Ireland, was extremely important.

Ensuring that the UK gives effect to this commitment is now a significant focus of the Irish Government, and we have the full support of our EU partners and of the European Commission Task Force in this regard.

Additionally, the Government has introduced a range of measures to deal with the short-term impacts of Brexit. In terms of dealing with Competitiveness issues, my Department introduced a €150 million low-cost loan scheme, new agri-taxation measures and increased funding under the Rural Development and Seafood Development Programmes in the 2017 Budget. In Budget 2018 I, along with my colleague the Minister for Enterprise, Business and Innovation, introduced a new €300m “Brexit Loan Scheme” to provide affordable, flexible financing to Irish businesses that are either currently impacted by Brexit or who will be in the future - at least 40% of which will be available to food businesses.

Under Market Diversification, my Department is supporting Bord Bia in its investment in market insight (through its ‘Thinking House’) and in market prioritisation initiatives which are aimed at identifying and developing potential diversification opportunities. Indeed, I have increased funding to Bord Bia by €14.5m since the UK referendum.

As regards Product Diversification, I am supporting Teagasc in the development of a new National Food Innovation Hub in Fermoy (€8.8 million funding announced by An Taoiseach and myself last October).

I wish to assure the Deputy that the Government remains very focused on supporting farmers and the agri-food industry through the challenges ahead, whether they are based in the border region or in any other part of the country. The Government will be firm in arguing that any agreement reached between the EU and the UK must take account of the very serious challenges presented by Brexit for the sector, particularly given the unique circumstances on the island of Ireland and the importance of our economic relationship with the UK. And, of course, ultimately Ireland’s objective in the negotiations is to have a trading relationship with the UK which is as close as possible to the current arrangements.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

243. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payments will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40276/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named submitted a 2018 Basic Payment/Areas of Natural Constraint Schemes application on the 19th February 2018. EU Regulations governing the administration of these schemes require that full and comprehensive administrative checks, including in some cases remote sensing (i.e. satellite) inspections, be completed before any payments issue.

The application of the person named was selected for a Remote Sensing eligibility inspection. This inspection has now been completed and the results have been processed to finalisation. Payment due under Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme will issue very shortly to the nominated bank account of the person named.

GLAS Issues

244. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he will take to examine the issues raised in correspondence with a view to allowing a person (details supplied) to retire from farming without penalty; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40329/18]

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 received all payments in respect of scheme years 2016 and 2017.

GLAS commitments are generally for a minimum period of five years. Where the GLAS contract is withdrawn before completion of the full term all monies paid are subject to recoupment.

However section 20 of the GLAS terms and conditions allow a participant to withdraw without recoupment where force majeure is deemed to apply.

The person named must write directly to the GLAS section in Johnstown Castle Wexford outlining their request to withdrawn under section 20 and providing full details of their case.

Waste Management

245. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to Parliamentary Question No. 215 of 26 September 2018 (details supplied), if rigid plastics that are coloured black are recycled following kerbside collection in view of the difficulties for sorting machines identifying black plastics in the sorting process and in circumstances in which they are not generally recycled following collection; if advice to the public on avoiding the purchase of such material will be updated; the actions he plans to take to prevent such material entering the waste stream; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40156/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The processing of rigid plastics, including separation and segregation, continues to improve across the industry.

More recently, major investment in advanced optical separators by significant processors has improved the separation of black rigid plastics enhancing the potential for ultimate recycling of this material.

The processing industry is also actively collaborating with the manufacturers of rigid black plastics to ensure that these materials are increasingly visible to the available optical technologies.

In some circumstances where processing capability is incomplete, rigid black plastics may pass through the processing plants, however in these situations the material is more likely to be recovered rather than disposed of.

While the primary objective is to prevent waste arising in line with the waste hierarchy, the on-going advice, with regard to rigid black plastic waste, is to segregate and place in the recycling bin in accordance with Recycling list Ireland (www.recyclinglistireland.ie).

The Government has funded a range of measures to support better recycling so that more plastic which is suitable for recycling is diverted from the residual bin, waste to energy plants and landfill, including:

- the development a national standardised list of items that can go into the recycling bin, including rigid plastic items, which is available at <http://recyclinglistireland.ie/>;
- a public education campaign on the recycling list rolled out by the regional waste management authorities, comprising radio advertisements, social media, billboards/posters, etc., to promote the list; and,
- a ‘master recycling’ programme, also run by the regional waste management authorities, in partnership with environmental NGOs, to roll out 650 workshops across the country training recycling ambassadors to bring the recycling message to a wide variety of communities.

Renewable Heat Incentive

246. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the establishment of the renewable heat support scheme further to the publication of the draft terms and conditions of the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40190/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Support Scheme for Renewable Heat has been developed to financially support the adoption of renewable heating systems by commercial, industrial, agricultural, district heating and other non-domestic heat users not covered by the EU Emissions Trading System.

The first phase of the scheme, an installation grant for heat pumps, opened for applications on 12 September 2018. This phase of the scheme will support ground, air and water source electric heat pump installations providing grant-aid of up to 30% of the installation cost.

The scheme is administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI). Further details, including the terms and conditions and how to apply, are available on the SEAI website.

The second phase of the scheme, an operational support for biomass boilers and anaerobic digestion heating systems, is expected to open for applications later this year, subject to state aid approval from the European Commission.

Energy Policy

247. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to carry out a strategic overview of the energy impact of data centres; and if so, when it will be published. [40202/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): In recognition of the economic benefits that data centres can bring to Ireland, the Government published a national policy statement on the strategic importance of data centres as part of Ireland’s Enterprise Strategy in July 2018. The Policy Statement strengthens the Strategic Policy Framework around the development of data centres in Ireland while taking account of wider energy policy developments including growth in renewable electricity capacity.

The Policy Statement makes it clear that planning and development of the electricity transmission system, including network investment needs and long term scenario planning, should be guided by Project Ireland 2040 in terms of more balanced regional development and a planned approach. This has been reflected in EirGrid’s recent Tomorrow Energy Scenarios Locations Report which includes a scenario with a greater regional spread of data centres which was

published in August 2018. As a next step, EirGrid's forthcoming Transmission System Needs Assessment Report will identify any future needs on the transmission system brought about by changes in electricity generation, demand, storage or interconnection.

Renewable Energy Generation

248. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans regarding the use of renewable energy for small operators to allow them produce electricity through small wind turbines or solar panels and the arrangements whereby small producers who use the electricity for their own business purposes can get connection to the grid through the smart metering process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40245/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): In July 2018, I announced details of a new pilot scheme to support micro generation, initially targeting solar PV, homeowners and self-consumption. The data gathered during the pilot scheme will inform potential future phases of support for micro-generation in Ireland that may be appropriate, as we align with the ambition and requirements of the recast Renewable Energy Directive (RED) that recognises the rights, entitlements and obligations of renewable self-consumers.

Last year, my Department assessed micro generation, across a number of renewable electricity generating technologies, as part of the economic analysis to underpin the new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS). The assessment identified technical and financial challenges, which may need to be addressed before a broader support scheme for micro generation can be introduced. This is in line with international and EU experience, where many member states who have introduced supports for micro generation have had to reform them or cancel them altogether.

The reality is that bringing micro generation onto a system designed for large generators is complicated. It impacts how we pay for the network, how we manage regulation and how we technically manage the system. My Department is continuing to work closely with the micro-generation sector and the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) to better understand how to validate and further develop these policies in a fair and cost effective manner.

In September 2017, the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) announced its delivery plan for smart meters in Ireland. The plan provides for the phased rollout of smart meters to every home and business in the country over a six-year period from 2019. The rollout will occur in a structured and phased basis, commencing with an initial delivery of 250,000 meters across 2019-2020 and approximately 500,000 meters in each of the four subsequent years. The initial priority is to respond to consumers who request a smart meter and to replace older meters, which are approaching the end of their life expectancy.

In the interim period until smart meters have been rolled out to customers, ESB Networks will provide import/export metering to the grid where required for domestic and commercial premises. Details are available at www.esbnetworks.ie.

Driver Licences

249. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he is satisfied that when a person's driving ban expires the person's driver licence is only posted on

the day the ban is officially ended and consequently the ban is de facto extended by the length of time it takes for the licence to arrive in the post; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40328/18]

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.

Domestic Violence Refuges Provision

250. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to introduce a women's refuge in counties Cavan and Monaghan; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40193/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, has statutory responsibility for the care and protection of victims of domestic, sexual or gender-based violence, whether in the context of the family or otherwise. Accordingly, Tusla has provided funding for domestic, sexual and gender-based violence services since its foundation in 2014. This includes services in Counties Cavan and Monaghan.

As part of Tusla's commissioning approach to the development of services, Tusla carried out a number of needs analysis projects in 2017 to identify gaps in service provision and to prioritise service developments. All future service developments, whether based in the North East region or elsewhere, will be informed by Tusla's commissioning approach.

I have requested that Tusla respond directly to the Deputy on this matter.

Child and Family Agency

251. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if an element of Tusla is moving its operation to a location (details supplied); the number of staff who will be relocated; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40195/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): This is an operational matter for Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. I have requested Tusla to respond directly to the Deputy on this matter.

Social Innovation Fund Ireland

252. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if worker, consumer and member co-operatives can avail of the €50 million Social Innovation Fund Ireland. [40218/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Social Innovation Fund Ireland (SIFI) was established in 2013 following on from the recommendations of a 2012 report of the Forum on Philanthropy and Fundraising. Its mission is to provide growth capital to Ireland's best social innovations, investing in solutions to social problems and creating jobs. SIFI finds and backs innovative solutions to critical social issues in Ireland and is charged with establishing a philanthropic fund of significant size and impact to aid the development of social innovation.

My Department has recently agreed a three-year contract with SIFI which will include a continued commitment to match philanthropic funding raised by SIFI with State funding. Since 2016, SIFI has opened 15 public calls for applications and supported 47 innovations to date.

The Fund will accept applications from eligible non-for-profit legal forms, including companies limited by guarantee, charities, trusts or foundations and some co-operatives. Projects applying for any fund created by SIFI must also meet the following standard SIFI core criteria:

- the project must address a critical social issue;
- the solution proposed by the applicant must be innovative in an Irish context;
- the applicant's solution must have potential and a desire to scale or replicate in Ireland (it may also have potential internationally, but this is not a requirement);
- the project must provide evidence that it is up and running, or has been tested at least in a minimal way;
- the project must be based on the island of Ireland and make its main impact in the Republic of Ireland.

In addition, some further criteria are tailored to specific funds operated by SIFI.

Rural Development Policy

253. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if he will address the diminution of services such as banking and post office services in rural Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40254/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): In my role as Minister for Rural and Community Development I am absolutely clear on the importance of ensuring that rural communities can access the services they need so that they remain vibrant places in which to live and work.

As the Deputy is aware, the Minister for Finance has responsibility for banking and the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment has policy responsibility for the postal sector.

However, I am acutely aware of the value placed by rural communities on services such as those provided by banks and post offices. Ensuring access to services for rural communities is an issue that cuts across almost all Government Departments. It also relates to services provided by the private sector.

The Deputy will no doubt appreciate that the provision of services by banks, including the location of branches, is a commercial decision for the boards and management of those institutions.

That said, I expect that any bank closing branches will do everything that it can to mitigate the impacts of the branch closures on local communities, including use of technology and the use of alternative means of service delivery.

In relation to postal services, I am providing €80,000 to the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment in order to support the establishment of 10 'Digital Assist' Post Offices. This initiative, which was launched this week, will see these post offices act as

pilots for the provision of new services. By creating a network of connected post offices I hope to help make the post office central to the community and local business and help sustain the viability of the post office network into the future.

My Department is supporting the many vibrant towns and villages across rural Ireland through a range of schemes and supports. The evidence of impact can be seen in growing opportunities for employment and improved quality of life across rural Ireland.

Project Ireland 2040 laid out the Government's plans for the country's long-term development, and a key commitment within it regarding rural Ireland is the provision of €1 billion for the new Rural Regeneration and Development Fund, which is an unprecedented commitment by Government to strengthen our rural economies and, in turn, support stronger local communities.

Initially, €315 million has been allocated for the period 2019-2022 and the first call for applications to the Fund closed last Thursday.

My Department administers a range of other funding programmes that support local communities throughout Ireland. Of particular importance for those towns and villages most disadvantaged in terms of access to services are:

The CLÁR programme, which is a targeted investment programme for rural areas that aims to provide funding for small infrastructural projects and other initiatives in areas that have experienced significant levels of population decline.

The Community Enhancement Programme, which was launched by my Department in May 2018 and provides small capital grants to community groups across the country. I was delighted to announce a further €8million in funding for this programme last Friday, bringing the total for 2018 to €12.5million.

The Town and Village Renewal Scheme supports the revitalisation of rural towns and villages, with particular focus on projects which have a clear positive economic impact on local communities. Since its launch in 2016, the Town and Village Renewal Scheme has invested €31.6 million in more than 450 projects across the country.

The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2018-2022, with funding of €38m in 2018, provides capacity at local level to respond to the particular needs in each area. It helps those seeking employment or starting their own business.

LEADER funding, administered by Local Action Groups, delivers the €250 million programme funding in accordance with the specific objectives and needs identified by the LAGs themselves as part of the development of Local Development Strategies. Therefore the supports are tailored to the specific needs of each individual area.

Libraries will also work with local partners to reach disadvantaged, marginalised and new communities, increasing these communities' awareness of services available and firmly establishing the library as a resource for all. Some €150m is expected to be invested by local authorities in library services in 2018.

In terms of directly facilitating access to services in rural Ireland, the Department of Transport has provided a funding allocation of €14.9 million for local link services in 2018. Such funding facilitated 1.9 million passenger journeys last year – providing a vital service for rural communities.

Social Welfare Code

254. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will address matters raised by an organisation (details supplied) relating to budget 2019; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40129/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Budget 2018 measures that took effect from 29 March this year, specifically the increases to the income disregard, the primary rate and the increase for a qualified child, assisted a lone parent in receipt of the one-parent family payment or jobseeker's transitional payment, working 15 hours a week on the National Minimum Wage, to be better off by almost €1,000 per year.

The income disregard on the Jobseeker's Transitional Payment (JST) scheme has increased from €60 to €130 across Budgets 2016 to 2018. The One-Parent Family Payment (OFP) income disregard increased from €90 to €130 across Budgets 2017 and 2018.

In relation to the working hours requirement associated with qualification for payment of the Working Family Payment (WFP), a person must be engaged in full-time insurable employment which is expected to last for at least 3 months and be working for a minimum of 38 hours per fortnight or 19 hours per week.

This has reduced from 30 hours when the scheme was initially introduced in 1984. It is important that the WFP does not inadvertently subsidise unsustainably low earnings or encourage employers to offer minimal hours of employment.

If a person cannot meet the 19 hours WFP threshold, or if their hours vary significantly from week to week, the Department offers a number of other schemes that can provide income support that can be combined with earnings from employment, subject to each individual's circumstances. These include the jobseeker schemes, disability allowance, carer's allowance, the one-parent family payment, jobseeker's transitional payment and the part-time job incentive scheme. Combined, the Department provides an extensive system of social welfare supports which facilitate recipients taking up some employment while maintaining their social welfare payment.

Any changes to the rules of eligibility of the SUSI maintenance grant and the cost implications of such changes are a matter for the Department for Education and Skills.

Any changes to OFP and JST in Budget 2019 will have to be considered in the overall budgetary context, in light of available resources and other priorities.

Carer's Allowance Applications

255. **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. [40140/18]

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 child or an adult who has such a disability that as a result they require that level of care.

An application for CA was received from the person concerned on 19 June 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.

Working Family Payment Applications

256. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the progress to date in the determination of an application for family income supplement in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40144/18]

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 11th August 2018.

The applicant has been awarded WFP for 52 weeks with effect from 09th August 2018 to 07th August 2019.

The first weekly payment and all arrears owing issued to the applicant's nominated bank account on Friday 28th September 2018.

The person concerned was notified on 26th September 2018 of this decision and of their right of review & appeal.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Eligibility

257. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the relevant forms for a review of a disability allowance entitlement will be furnished to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40165/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The person concerned was awarded a reduced rate of disability allowance (DA) with effect from 11 November 2015 by an Appeals Officer.

A review can be requested by the person concerned by writing directly to the DA section outlining the reasons for the request. On submission of this request, her means will be re-examined. There are no formal application forms for requesting such a review.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Applications

258. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an application by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry for illness benefit will be processed. [40212/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The person concerned made an application for Illness Benefit for

the period from 28th August 2018.

The claim could not be paid as the person concerned was receiving Jobseeker's Benefit and has been paid up to 26th September on this claim.

The Jobseeker's Benefit claim is now closed and it is expected that payment of Illness Benefit will issue this week.

I hope this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility

259. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to improve the State pension, contributory, for persons who left the workforce to rear families and are now on a reduced State pension due to same; her further plans to rectify this unfair situation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40219/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): On 23 January last, I proposed and Government agreed to my 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 a new provision for up to 20 years of home-caring periods to be recognised in the calculation of payment rates.

A number of elements have to be put in place to facilitate the implementation of these changes. Legislation has to be enacted to enable implementation of these arrangements and an information technology system has to be developed and tested. My Department is currently working on these projects and both are at a very advanced stage. In addition, my Department is currently designing procedures and assigning staff to process reviews of pensions.

My Department will be writing to impacted customers in the next two months to explain to them what is happening and how the process of review will work. As I have stated previously, it is still planned to commence these 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, or later where a person attained their 66th birthday since that date.

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 then write again 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.

Carer's Benefit Applications

260. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will be made on a carer's benefit application by a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40258/18]

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 22 June 2018.

Additional information was requested from the person concerned on 1 October 2018. Once the information is received the application will be processed without delay and she will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility

261. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the measures she is introducing to reverse pension cuts which affect workers who left the workforce for a time; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40263/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): On 23 January last, I proposed and Government agreed to my 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 home caring in the calculation of that entitlement.

A number of elements have to be put in place to facilitate the implementation of these changes. Legislation has to be enacted to enable implementation of these arrangements and an information technology system has to be developed and tested. My Department is currently working on these components which are at a very advanced stage. In addition, my Department is currently designing procedures and assigning staff to process reviews of pensions.

My Department will be writing to impacted customers in the next two months to explain to them what is happening and how the process of review will work. As I have stated previously, it is still planned to commence these 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, or later where a person attained their 66th birthday since that date.

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 then write again 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.

Social Welfare Benefits

262. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will address concerns raised regarding reports that the Christmas bonus is to be cut in 2018; if she will clarify the matter; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40283/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Christmas Bonus was abolished in the 2009 Supplementary Budget and was partially reinstated as a 25% payment in 2014. This increased to 75% in 2015 and the Bonus was paid at 85% in 2016 and 2017.

The decision to pay a Christmas Bonus, and the rate of payment, is usually made as part of the Budget process. The cost of paying an 85% bonus, as in 2016 and 2017, is estimated at

€220.3 million.

As in previous years when a Bonus was subsequently paid, the Department's estimates do not include the cost of a Bonus payment. However, I recently announced that a Christmas Bonus will be paid this year.

The decision regarding the payment of a Bonus in 2018, including the rate at which it is to be paid, has to be consistent with the legal requirements set out in the domestic Fiscal Responsibility Acts 2012 and 2013 and the targets set for Ireland by the EU Stability and Growth Pact.

Social Welfare Benefits Data

263. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of social welfare payments paid out by type of payment in a post office in tabular form (details supplied); the amount of each payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40285/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The information requested by the Deputy is not available currently in the format requested by the Deputy. My officials will write to the Deputy on the matter as soon as possible.

Working Family Payment Appeals

264. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will issue on a working family payment appeal by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40287/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an oral hearing of the appeal by the person concerned took place on 2 August 2018 and that the Appeals Officer is now considering the appeal in the light of all of the evidence submitted, including that adduced at the oral hearing. It is expected that a decision will issue to the person concerned within the next week.

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.

Pensions Legislation

265. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when legislation will be brought before Dáil Éireann to legislate for the proposed total contributions approach to calculating pensions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40290/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): On 23 January last, I proposed and Government agreed to my 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 home caring in the calcula-

tion of that entitlement.

Legislation has to be enacted to enable implementation of these arrangements and an information technology system has to be developed and tested. My Department is currently working on both of these projects and both are at a very advanced stage. In addition, my Department is currently designing procedures and assigning staff to process reviews of pensions.

My Department will be writing to impacted customers in the next two months to explain to them what is happening and how the process of review will work. As I have stated previously, it is still planned to commence these 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, or later where a person attained their 66th birthday since that date.

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 then write again 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.

Community Employment Schemes Eligibility

266. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will address a matter (details supplied) regarding community employment scheme rules; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40297/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The purpose 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. In addition, the scheme operates a ring-fenced CE Drugs Response for people who have experienced addiction issues.

The eligibility for participation on the CE is dependent on the individual circumstances of each person and the length of time she or he has been in receipt of a CE-qualifying social welfare payment.

Disability clients self-refer to CE where they can avail of training and education supports to develop their skill sets and enhance their employability. In general all new CE entrants aged between 21 and 55 years can participate for 1 year. 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 and by three years for participants who qualified through a disability-linked payment.

Persons in receipt of a qualifying disability-linked social welfare payment are eligible for an overall lifetime limit on a CE scheme of 7 years.

My Department is committed to supporting people with disability to participate more fully in society and to become more self-sufficient by providing employment activation supports that address barriers that they may face.

The person to whom the Deputy refers should contact their local INTREO centre to discuss options available to them.

State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility

267. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of her plans to correct the changes from 2012 that disadvantaged over 40,000 pensioners; if her plans to contact those who were affected by rate band changes in autumn 2018 are on schedule; when she expects these letters to issue; when she anticipates the new rates to take effect for this cohort; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40298/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): On 23 January last, I proposed and Government agreed to my 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 home-caring in the calculation of that entitlement.

A number of elements have to be put in place to facilitate the implementation of these changes. Legislation has to be enacted to enable implementation of these arrangements and an information technology system has to be developed and tested. My Department is currently working on these projects and both are at a very advanced stage. In addition, my Department is currently designing procedures and assigning staff to process reviews of pensions.

My Department will be writing to impacted customers in the next two months to explain to them what is happening and how the process of review will work. As I have stated previously, it is still planned to commence these 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, or later where a person attained their 66th birthday since that date.

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 then write again 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.

Housing Adaptation Grant

268. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the housing aid for older people scheme will include grant aid to upgrade an existing heating system, particularly the central heating boiler, in view of the fact that this work is no longer grant aided by the SEAI (details supplied). [40152/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): 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 improvement works carried out. The grant eligible works include the provision of heating and any repair or improvement works which are considered reasonably necessary.

The detailed administration of these grants, including the assessment, approval and prioritisation of grants to applicants under the various measures, is the responsibility of the local authorities. In this regard local authorities prioritise applications on the basis of the medical needs of the applicant and on the urgency and necessity of the identified works. In that context, local authorities do consider heating upgrade works on a case by case basis and I understand that this has now been clarified with Cork County Council.

Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund

269. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount of LIHAF funding drawn down in County Meath to date by project in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40204/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The aim of the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund is to relieve critical infrastructural blockages to enable the accelerated delivery of housing on key development sites and to improve the economic viability of new housing projects in Dublin and in urban areas with high demand for housing. There are two projects in County Meath being supported by LIHAF funding, at Ratoath (an outer relief road) and Farganstown, Navan (a distributor road).

Funding for LIHAF projects is provided on a matched funding basis with 75% of project costs supported by Exchequer funding, and the remaining 25% being contributed by the local authority. The following table details the payments made from the Exchequer portion of the funding on both projects for 2017 and the first two quarters in 2018. My Department will shortly be inviting local authorities to submit quarter three claims.

Table: LIHAF payments to date to projects in County Meath

Project	Payments (€) - 2017 to Q2 2018
Ratoath	26,901.71
Farganstown, Navan	43,531.01

Fire Stations Provision

270. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the construction of the Kilmacthomas fire station will commence in view of the fact that it is due to commence in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40282/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The provision of a fire service in its functional area, including the establishment and maintenance of a fire brigade, the assessment of fire cover needs, and the provision of fire station premises, is a statutory function of individual fire authorities under the Fire Service Act, 1981. My Department supports the fire authorities through setting general policy, providing a central training programme, issuing guidance on operational and other related matters and providing capital funding for priority infrastructural projects.

In February 2016, my Department announced a five-year Fire Services Capital Programme with an allocation of €40 million, based on the current annual €8 million allocation, to be used for the purchase of fire appliances and specialist equipment, building or upgrading of prioritised Fire Stations, an upgrade of the Communications and Mobilisation system and improvements to Training Centres. This programme includes a provision for the construction of sixteen new builds and ten fire station upgrade/ refurbishments.

A new fire station at Kilmacthomas is provided for in this Fire Services Capital Programme, with an indicative date for construction in 2019. My Department will work with the local authority to progress this project in line with the indicative 2019 start envisaged in the Capital Programme.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

271. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when an affordable housing scheme will be announced; if a scheme will be announced for Galway city and county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40292/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): A three-pronged, targeted approach to affordable housing is being pursued. Firstly, in terms of affordable housing for purchase, relevant provisions of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 have been commenced, which place the new scheme for affordable purchase on a statutory footing. This Scheme, aimed at households, including any qualifying military personnel, earning low to moderate annual gross incomes of maximum €50,000 for a single applicant and maximum €75,000 for joint applicants, will be delivered by local authorities developing their sites in key locations. The Scheme will be complementary to 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 scheme.

Secondly, I am determined that cost rental homes become a major part of our rental landscape in the future, making a sustainable impact on housing affordability, national competitiveness, and the attractiveness of our main urban centres as places to live as well as work. Cost rental is an important component of progressive housing systems around Europe. Two cost rental projects have previously been announced for Emmet Road, Inchicore, and at Enniskerry Road, Dundrum. Learning from these pilot projects, I expect cost rental projects to be rolled out across other suitable sites.

Finally, in order to support local authorities to get their sites ready for affordable housing, I am providing additional funding for enabling infrastructure via the Serviced Sites Fund. This overall minimum investment of €100 million will provide funding for those sites that require infrastructural investment in order for them to be brought into use for affordable housing. The fund is initially open to the areas worst affected by housing undersupply and affordability. On 29 June, I invited applications under the SSF from 11 local authorities, including Galway City. The call closed on 31 August and 15 proposals were submitted by 9 local authorities, including Galway City. The submissions are currently being assessed in my Department and I expect to be in a position to make the initial awards of funding later this month.

Finally, the Government has now launched the Land Development Agency which is aiming to build some 150,000 new homes over the next 20 years. The new Agency has an immediate focus on managing the State's own lands to develop new homes, with at least 40% of these homes being for social and affordable housing purposes.

Housing Adaptation Grant Eligibility

272. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the previous year's income is the income that must be assessed when housing aid for older persons and housing adaptation grants for persons with a disability are being assessed; if current year income can be assessed in circumstances in which there has been a permanent change in circumstances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40293/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): While there is legislation that governs the administration of the Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability, the detailed administration of the Grants, including the assessment, approval and payment of grants to applicants, can include the scope to use current year income as the basis for assessment, in cases where there has been a permanent change in circumstances.

Home Loan Scheme

273. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the rationale for compelling applicants to take out specified local authority mortgage protection insurance which is often more expensive than self-sourced market MPI in the context of the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme; if he is satisfied that the practice of restricting consumers' ability to shop around for alternative insurance products is not vulnerable to being found to be anti-competitive and in breach of EU antitrust rules that prohibit cartels and restrictive business practices and-or abuse of a dominant market position in view of Rebuilding Ireland's unique market position in providing mortgages to those who must demonstrate being refused mortgages elsewhere in order to qualify; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40327/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): It is a statutory requirement that mortgage protection insurance (MPI) is taken out in respect of all local authority housing loans. The Local Authority Mortgage Protection Insurance scheme is a group scheme and is designed to provide an appropriate level of insurance cover to those who wish to avail of such loans, including the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan. It is overseen by the Mortgage Protection Insurance Committee, a sub-committee of the County and City Management Association (CCMA) with representatives from the CCMA, local authorities, the Housing Finance Agency, as well as my Department and has applied to all house purchase loans approved by local authorities since 1 July 1986.

One of the conditions of the group policy scheme is that it is obligatory for all borrowers who meet the eligibility criteria to join the scheme. Altering this condition would have a negative impact on the scheme and increase the cost for all existing borrowers.

The scheme offers a number of additional features over and above the standard MPI products available on the market. Standard MPI products are individually priced, based on a member's age, amongst other factors, whereas the local authority MPI scheme is a group arrangement, offering a single group rate per €1,000 sum assured to all participants in the scheme.

The scheme also provides other benefits over standard MPI products. These include the payment of mortgage repayments if there is a valid claim as a result of disability; an additional payment of €3,000 in the event of a member's death, separate to life cover; and members are also covered for death up to age 75 rather than 65 as is the case under standard MPI cover.

The insurance scheme is subject to periodic review and competitive tendering, in accordance with the terms of EU Directives relating to the award of public service contracts. This is to ensure that the most appropriate cover at the best value for money is secured for local authority borrowers over the entire life of their mortgages.

Compensation Schemes

274. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will address a matter (details supplied) regarding a compensation scheme for farmers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40125/18]

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. I should note however that the level of funding referred to was proposed by the farming organisations rather than my

Department.

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 schemes for farmers in designated areas. 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.

Departmental Funding

275. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht when she expects to announce funding provision for a project (details supplied). [40281/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): My Department has been examining the request for additional funding in relation to the project to which the Deputy refers. This examination is continuing.

Special Areas of Conservation

276. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of persons who appealed a SAC designation on their lands; the number of persons who have successfully had their lands declassified as a SAC as a result of an appeal in each of the years 2013 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40291/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): Formal appeals against the inclusion of lands within a site proposed for designation as a special area of conservation (candidate special area of conservation) are heard by the Designated Areas Appeals Advisory Board.

Following an appeal hearing, the Board makes a recommendation to me, as Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. This recommendation is based on scientific grounds as to whether lands should be included in the candidate special area of conservation. The recommendation of the Designated Areas Appeals Advisory Board may be accepted in full, in part or rejected.

Details of the number of appeals heard by the Board and the outcome of each appeal from 2013 to 2018 (to date) are outlined in the following table.

Year	No. of appeals heard by the Board	Outcome
2013	1	Unsuccessful
2014	0	Not applicable
2015	2	2 Partly Successful
2016	5	4 Partly Successful, 1 Unsuccessful
2017	9	7 Partly Successful, 2 Unsuccessful
2018	2	1 Partly Successful, 1 withdrawn at the appeals hearing itself.