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].

Written Answers

Local Authority Expenditure

1. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Taoiseach the percentage of GDP controlled by local authorities here. [40703/18]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Joe McHugh): The following table presents total expenditure of local government, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Ireland and local government expenditure as a percentage of GDP for the years 2013 to 2017. 2017 is an estimate until the amalgamated Local Authority annual financial statement is available.

€ million

-	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Expenditure of Local Government	6,496	5,517	5,881	6,368	6,494
GDP	179,922	195,293	262,466	273,238	294,110
Local Government Expenditure as % GDP	3.6%	2.8%	2.2%	2.3%	2.2%

Ministerial Communications

2. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Taoiseach if there is a policy regarding ministerial use of private email for Government business in his Department; and if so, if it will be published. [40673/18]

The Taoiseach: The Department of the Taoiseach has an ICT Policy which stipulates that where personal email accounts are used for business purposes, due regard must be taken of the sensitivity and confidentiality of the information being transmitted.

The ICT Policy further requires that, where personal email accounts are used for business purposes, a copy of any record created must be retained in an appropriate official electronic filing system and/or hard copy file which can be accessed should the need arise.

Although I and the staff working in my Department have been assigned Departmental email accounts which are used for official business, there may be occasional operational reasons to use a personal email account. From time to time, a third party may email me about official business using an address other than my Departmental address. This has occurred previously where the third party may have had a particular address to contact me prior to my appointment as Taoiseach.

In line with my Department's ICT policy, if such correspondence is received, I or my staff copy the reply to Government officials thereby creating a record of the correspondence which can be accessed at a later date. All staff working in my Department have signed the ICT Policy, new staff joining the Department are furnished with a copy of it and extracts of the Policy relating to the use of private email have been released under Freedom of Information and are, therefore, in the public domain.

Official Engagements

3. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Taoiseach if he and-or officials in his Department attended the 2018 Ryder Cup; if so, the reason they attended; the days on which they attended; the officials they met from a Ryder Cup organisation or the European Tour; and the costs for each individual's attendance. [40886/18]

The Taoiseach: The Secretary General of my Department attended the 2018 Ryder Cup for one day at the invitation of the European Tour. The purpose of his attendance was to discuss the possibility of the hosting of a future Ryder Cup in Ireland. The European Tour requested that the meeting would be held at Le Golf National in Paris on one of the three days of the Ryder Cup, in order to illustrate the scale of the infrastructure required by the event.

He met with the CEO and Deputy CEO of the European Tour and the Ryder Cup Director. He was also in contact with a former Ryder Cup Captain who is also a member of the European Tour Board.

The cost of flights was €483.16, hotel €152.15 and train fare €10.30.

Departmental Programmes

4. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the involvement of his Department in tackling adult literacy; if a financial allocation is provided for same; if so, the way in which it is utilised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40679/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): There are no programmes to tackle adult literacy in the Department of Defence.

Defence Forces Remuneration

5. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence when serving personnel from the Defence Forces can expect to have their tech three payment issued which was suspended during the downturn period; and the timeframe for the reinstatement of this payment. [40756/18]

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. Discussions in this regard have commenced with the relevant representative association.

Defence Forces Medical Services

6. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if it is the standard practice that a senior medical officer will carry out a full medical prior to overseas deployment but that a junior medical officer will provide a prescription for anti-malaria drugs; the reason for this practice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40800/18]

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

The matter raised relates to current litigation against the Minister. There are a number of claims made by current and former members of the Defence Forces who allege personal injury as a consequence of their consumption of Lariam. The State Claims Agency has advised that 164 claims have been made in this regard to date, and the next case is listed for hearing on 20 November, 2018. 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.

Naval Service Vessels

7. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the occasions in the past five years that a Naval Service ship was delayed from setting out to sail at the scheduled time and date; the reason for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40801/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Naval Service is the State's principal sea-going agency and is tasked with a variety of defence and other roles. 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. The Naval Service is tasked with patrolling all Irish waters from the shoreline to the outer limits of the Exclusive Economic Zone. These patrols are carried out on a regular and frequent basis and are directed to all areas of Irish waters as necessary.

On any given patrol day the Naval Service can carry out a number of taskings on behalf of other State agencies such as the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority, An Garda Síochána and the

Customs Service of the Revenue Commissioners.

The following table sets out the number of patrol days completed in the past five years and the outputs clearly show a focused and committed Naval Service that is continuing to produce a high level of performance.

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Number of Patrol Days carried out	1382	1127	1204	1376	1408
Scheduled Patrol Days Lost	135	353	276	104	72

The Naval Service has carried out a total of 928 patrol days to end August while there have been 138 scheduled patrol days lost to-date. Scheduled patrol days are impacted by a range of factors including adverse weather conditions, unscheduled maintenance and staffing restrictions.

Defence Forces Training

8. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of staff involved in training new recruits; the whole-time equivalent of those involved in training new recruits; the rank of those involved; if those involved in training are included in establishment figures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40803/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The primary function of training and education in the Defence Forces is to develop and maintain the capabilities necessary to enable it to fulfil the roles laid down by Government.

New recruits complete a 15 week course to qualify as Two Star Privates. They then proceed immediately onto a 10 week Two Star to Three Star course. Once this training has been completed, they are deemed fully trained.

Personnel involved in training are included in the agreed establishment figure of 9,500. The number of personnel involved in such training will vary, depending on the number of recruits being trained at any one time. Currently there are 136 recruits in training, split among 4 platoons. Typically, the personnel required, for training purposes, for each recruit platoon includes the following ranks: -

- 1 x Lieutenant

- 1 x Sergeant

- 8 to 10 Corporals (depending on the size of the platoon)

- There will also be assistance and supervision of the training conducted by Commandant (Comdt), Captain (Capt), Company Sergeant (CS), Company Quartermaster Sergeant (CQMS) and Private 3 Star (Pte 3*) although not on a full time basis.

Defence Forces Strength

9. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if the whole-time equivalent figure for the Defence Forces corresponds with the establishment figure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40804/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The current whole time equivalent strength of Permanent Defence Force for the end of September is estimated at just over 9,000 personnel. The Government remains committed to returning to, and maintaining the agreed strength of the Permanent Defence Force at 9,500 personnel as set out in the White Paper on Defence (2015).

In order to achieve this target, 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. The Permanent Defence Force continues to offer excellent career opportunities for serving personnel and for new entrants. General service recruitment campaigns, an officer cadetship competition, a competition for Air Corps apprentices, a competition for DF School of Music instrumentalists and the 2018 RDF recruitment campaigns all took place 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 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 end November. 85 Officer Cadets were inducted on the 24th September.

A second general service recruitment campaign was launched on 10 September 2018 and closed on 7 October 2018.

Final figures for numbers enlisted in 2018 will not be available until after year's end. As of 25 September 2018, 414 personnel have been inducted in 2018 and inductions will continue for the rest of the year. The bulk of inductions are weighted towards the second half of the year. Recruitment progress will be reviewed at year end and this will also inform the approach in 2019.

With the support of the Chief of Staff, the Government is committed to retaining the capacity of the Defence Forces to operate effectively across all roles and to undertake the tasks laid down by Government, both at home and abroad.

Defence Forces Recruitment

10. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of applications to join the Defence Forces in each of the past five years; the number of those that successfully passed each stage of the recruitment process; the number of those that were subsequently enlisted in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40805/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I am informed by the military authorities that it was not possible to collate the information requested by the Deputy in the timeframe available. I shall provide the figures to the Deputy when I receive them from the military authorities.

Defence Forces Recruitment

11. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the amount spent on recruitment to the Defence Forces in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40807/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The following table, provided by the military authorities, sets out the costs associated with recruitment advertising over the past five years:

Year	Recruitment Advertising Spend
2014	€74,586.64
2015	€134,350.84
2016	€175,330.00
2017	€457,809.83
2018	€318,622.00 YTD

In order to reduce panel waiting times, two general service recruit campaigns were held in 2017 and 2018. Other costs associated with recruitment such as training, equipment, provision of uniforms, meals, fuel costs and so on are not readily de-coupled from overall spending in those areas and are not routinely calculated.

The Government remains committed to reaching the authorised strength of 9,500 personnel for the Permanent Defence Force. There is ongoing recruitment to achieve that target and a range of alternative recruitment approaches are being developed. A working group is examining the scope for greater use of direct entry recruitment for certain specialist positions and steps are being progressed to enable former members of the Permanent Defence Force, who have sought after skills, to re-enter the PDF. I will continue to work closely with the Chief of Staff in developing these approaches.

Defence Forces Remuneration

12. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the reason new recruits are obliged to pay for rations; the cost to rectify this; if it is a matter that was brought before the conciliation and arbitration scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40809/18]

14. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to introduce a military service allowance at a lower rate for recruits in order to compensate them for the loss of the free travel pass; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40811/18]

15. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the estimated annual cost to provide a once-off €200 completion bonus for recruits that successfully complete their training; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40812/18]

16. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the estimated cost to restore the 10% reduction in the overseas allowances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40813/18]

17. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the estimated cost to restore all cuts to the military allowance; and if he will make a statement on the

matter. [40814/18]

18. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the estimated cost to restore the 5% cut in the military service allowance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40815/18]

23. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if the provision of long service increments as a measure to retain expert staff will be considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40820/18]

25. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if a review was carried out by the military authorities in regard to the technical pay structure of the Defence Forces following the Haddington Road agreement; if a report on same was provided to his Department; if so, the findings of the report ; if the report has been published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40822/18]

26. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if a review was carried out by the military authorities in regard to the technical pay structure of the Defence Forces following the Haddington Road agreement; if a report on same was provided to his Department; if so, the findings of the report ; if the report has been published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40823/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 12, 14 to 18, inclusive, 23, 25 and 26 together.

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 being 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. I will give due consideration to the findings and recommendations that arises from the work of the Commission.

The Public Service Agreement 2010-2014 (Croke Park Agreement) for the Defence Sector provided that a review would be undertaken of the current technical grading of appointments and/or classes of appointments for enlisted personnel, including consideration of whether current requirements merit tech pay, are at the appropriate rate of tech pay (including whether a higher or lower rate of tech pay should be paid) or can be me in a more cost effective manner. A review of technician pay in the Defence Forces is ongoing in my Department and PDFORRA will be consulted on developments.

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. Outstanding adjudications relating to the Defence Forces include, the Army Ranger Wing Allowance, Technical Pay increase for Cooks, Account Holders Allowance and Rations and Accommodation for recruits and apprentices.

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. Discussions in this regard has commenced with the relevant representative association.

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

The contribution from the Defence sector included a further reduction of 10% on the rate of certain allowances payable to the Defence Forces. This included a 10% reduction in overseas allowances. There are no plans at this stage to revoke the cost savings measures under this agreement and in this regard an estimated cost of restoration of the allowance is not available.

As I previously outlined, the Public Service Pay Commission is considering recruitment and retention issues in the Defence sector and will report in due course. This will inform future actions relating to recruitment and retention.

Defence Forces Representative Organisations

13. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the outstanding decisions of the conciliation and arbitration scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40810/18]

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 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. Discussions in this regard with the relevant Representative Association has commenced.

Questions Nos. 14 to 18, inclusive, answered with Question No. 12.

Defence Forces Personnel

19. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to engage with the military authorities and the representative organisations of the Defence Forces in respect of the application of the working time directive to Defence Forces personnel; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40816/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Work is well underway to apply the provisions of the Directive to members of the Permanent Defence Force. The Department of Defence and the Defence Forces have already undertaken significant work in examining the application of the Working Time Directive. 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 application of the Directive will involve a fundamental change in working conditions that have been in place for many years. It is a complex arrangement that requires considerable thought to ensure that on the one hand, employees' right are recognised and, on the other, that the Defence Forces continue to provide the varied roles assigned to them by Government.

The Department of Defence is currently engaging through the Conciliation and Arbitration process with the Defence Forces Representative Associations, RACO and PDFORRA, to discuss the application of the Working Time Directive to the Permanent Defence Force. A Working Group has been formed for this purpose.

Concurrently, Department is engaging with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection on required legislative changes. The Department of Justice and Equality is also a key stakeholder in this process.

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.

Defence Forces Representative Organisations

20. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number

of times he has met with organisations (details supplied) in an official capacity to discuss issues affecting Defence Forces personnel; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40817/18]

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.

Since my appointment as Minister with responsibility for Defence, I have met with representatives from RACO and PDFORRA on a number of occasions, both formally and informally.

In 2016, I met both RACO and PDFORRA in July. I attended the PDFORRA Annual Delegate Conference in October and the RACO Annual Banquet in November.

In 2017, I met had meetings with RACO and PDFORRA in July and October. I attended the PDFORRA Annual Delegate Conference in October and the RACO Biennial Delegate Conference in November.

In 2018, I met with officials from PDFORRA in September and just last week I attended the PDFORRA Annual Delegate Conference which took place in Breaffy House Hotel in Co. Mayo. I am also scheduled to attend the RACO Annual Delegate Conference next month.

Defence Forces Contracts

21. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to review the practice whereby continuance in service contracts are offered after two years; if this period will be extended to five years as a measure to address retention issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40818/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The White Paper on Defence sets the defence policy agenda up to 2025. As a subset of the totality of the work being carried out to implement the White Paper, nearly 90 projects/actions were specifically identified. Implementation of these specific actions will be carried out on a phased basis over the ten year period of the programme.

The review to which the Deputy refers forms part of one such project which entails a review of contracts of service for all ranks of enlisted personnel in the context of capability requirements and associated appropriate age profiles. Joint civil/military project planning is underway for this project.

Defence Forces Contracts

22. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of Defence Forces personnel on post-21 years service contracts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40819/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The military authorities could not collate the information within the time available. I will revert to the Deputy as soon as the information has been provided to me.

Question No. 23 answered with Question No. 12.

Defence Forces Personnel Data

24. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of personnel that have been discharged by purchase over each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40821/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The information sought by the Deputy could not be collated within the time available. I will revert to the Deputy as soon as the information is available.

Questions Nos. 25 and 26 answered with Question No. 12.

Defence Forces Representative Organisations

27. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to publish the review of the conciliation and arbitration scheme report; his further plans to implement the findings of the report; the timeframe for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40825/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Conciliation and Arbitration scheme for members of the Permanent Defence Force provides a formal mechanism for the Permanent Defence Force Representative Associations, that is PDFORRA and RACO, to engage with the Official side.

Having regard to commitments made under pay agreements, members of the Permanent Defence Force can make representations in relation to their pay and conditions of service through their representative bodies.

The scheme, since its inception in the early 1990's has provided the framework to progress many successful negotiated agreements between Defence management, PDFORRA and RACO. In light of the many changes in the industrial relations landscape since the establishment of the scheme earlier this year I announced a fundamental review of the scheme, to ensure that it remained efficient and effective for all parties.

I appointed Mr. Gerard Barry to carry out a review of the scheme. I received Mr. Barry's report on the review of the scheme last week. The report has been sent to all parties to the scheme, that is the Department of Defence, Defence Forces, Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, PDFORRA and RACO for their consideration. The report was published for general viewing on the Department of Defence website www.defence.ie on 2 October 2018.

All parties to the scheme are now considering the findings and recommendations outlined in the Report and, following an appropriate timeframe, the parties will engage in further discus-

sions. A timeframe to finalise a revised Scheme has not been agreed as yet.

Army Barracks

28. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if funding will be provided for the upgrade of the block 7 accommodation facility at Connolly Barracks in the Defence Forces training centre; when this project will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40869/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The accommodation facility known as Connolly, Block 7 is a two-storey building that accommodates recruits in an open plan 'transit accommodation" layout. The ground floor of the building was repainted in 2018 and no further work to the block is currently deemed necessary or proposed.

Under the Defence Forces Built Infrastructure programme it is planned to upgrade and refurbish the accommodation block at the DFTC known as Plunkett, Block 7.

A multi-discipline Design Team has been appointed for the project. The team is presently working on the development of the detailed proposals for the proposed refurbishment of the block, with a view to tenders for the works being sought in 2019, subject to approval to proceed with the tender process and the overall level of funding provision for the programme for next year.

Defence Forces Personnel

29. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if information regarding the discovery of a spyhole in the female shower area of the central supply area of the Naval Service was circulated to all female personnel in the Naval Service that may have utilised those facilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41078/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): In my reply on this matter to your earlier PQ, no. 39876/18, I undertook to revert to you with more information.

I have been informed by the military authorities that the Naval Service has confirmed that female personnel who are known to work in the Central Supply Section (CSS) building where the female shower/changing area is located have been made aware of the nature of the investigation.

Defence Forces Medicinal Products

30. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the details of the antimalarial drugs prescribed to the Defence Forces operating in sub-Saharan Africa in 2017 and to date in 2018; and the number of troops prescribed each drug respectively, in tabular form. [41087/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I have requested the information sought by the Deputy from the Military Authorities and I will revert to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Human Rights

31. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to a report by an organisation (details supplied) in relation to medical care in Bahraini prisons; his views on the lack of adequate medical care in Bahrain; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40727/18]

32. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the Bahraini Government has announced that parliamentary elections will take place on 24 November 2018 and that members of the main opposition groups are barred from running in the elections (details supplied); and his views on whether the upcoming elections cannot be considered as democratic. [40728/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 31 and 32 together.

I am aware of reports that prisoners in Bahrain have been denied adequate healthcare in prison. Ireland attaches great importance to safeguarding the human rights of all prisoners, with due regard for the international standards enshrined in the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners.

As I have stated in this House previously, I remain very concerned about the deteriorating human rights situation in Bahrain. Although Bahrain has repeatedly stated its commitment to improving its human rights record and safeguarding human rights as enshrined in the Bahraini Constitution, there are ongoing instances of violations of fundamental freedoms there, including violations of freedom of opinion and expression.

As the Deputy notes, the shrinking of civil and political space is particularly worrying in light of parliamentary elections which will take place in November this year. Good governance and accountability are vital for the realisation of human rights, and Ireland is committed to encouraging full participation in democratic processes. I am aware of reports that many opposition groups have been dissolved and that their members have been barred from running for election. These developments suggest an increasingly restrictive approach, targeting those who express views which oppose or challenge the Government in any way, including through parliamentary election processes.

Ireland regularly conveys its concerns about human rights to the Bahraini authorities, including through the Bahraini Embassy in London and through Ireland's (non-resident) Ambassador to Bahrain. In February of this year, officials from my Department met with the Ambassador of Bahrain in Dublin, and raised Ireland's concerns about the human rights situation in Bahrain.

Ireland also regularly raises the case of human rights in Bahrain at the Human Rights Council (HRC) in Geneva, in the form of national statements and its support to EU Statements. In Ireland's most recent Item 4 Statement (human rights situations that require the Council's attention) at the HRC session in September 2018, we expressed our concerns about "the ongoing restrictions on civil society space and the treatment of human rights defenders in Bahrain". We also called on Bahrain "to respect freedom of opinion and expression, and the right to a fair trial." At the previous HRC session in June 2018, Ireland also raised concerns under Item 4, and the EU in its Item 2 Statement (on the reports of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights) also highlighted the deterioration of the human rights situation, with particular reference to the shrinking of political space in Bahrain.

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

Visa Applications

33. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if there is a facility for a Filipino citizen applying for a visa to deal with a named official in his Department here rather than having to liaise with officials from the consulate in Manila; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40799/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Ireland has no Embassy in the Philippines and no Irish officials working there. The Embassy of Ireland to Singapore is currently accredited on a non-residential basis to the Philippines. You will be aware, however, that the Government announced in June this year the opening of a new Embassy in the Philippines as part Global Ireland 2025. The new mission will be operational by the end of 2020. At present, visa services in the Philippines are provided by our Honorary Consul in Manila. The consulate in Manila accepts applications for decision either by our Embassy in Singapore or the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service, a non-statutory agency of the Department of Justice and Equality. It is the policy of the Government that applicants resident in the Philippines submit their application for a visa through the consulate in Manila. Any person who has concerns about the services provided by an Irish Embassy or Consulate overseas can bring the matter to the attention of the Corporate Services Division of my department.

Foreign Conflicts

34. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on the situation in South Sudan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40828/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): South Sudan continues to endure an ongoing crisis, in large part the consequence of civil war. Since the most recent outbreak of conflict in 2015, over 50,000 people have been killed and more than 7 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance. The effects of the conflict on civilians has been exacerbated by drought, leading to severe food insecurity and the threat of famine and, in turn, massive population displacement.

On 12 September last, the President of South Sudan, Salva Kiir, signed a peace agreement with rebel factions, opening the possibility for change. While this peace agreement has the potential to mark a new departure, it is critical that South Sudan's leaders implement it without delay. The full cessation of violence and the facilitation of unimpeded humanitarian access would be important confidence building measures, but achieving lasting peace will require sustained effort and commitment as well as a genuinely inclusive approach to building the future South Sudan.Ireland strongly supports efforts to build peace in South Sudan.

Last November, during his visit to Addis Ababa, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade met representatives of IGAD (the Intergovernmental Authority on Development) and the African Union to discuss the situation in South Sudan.Ireland provides financial support to facilitate the IGAD-led High Level Revitalisation Forum for peace negotiations.

Departmental officials, in particular the Embassy in Addis Ababa, which has responsibility for South Sudan, continue to monitor the situation closely and engage with local, regional and international parties to encourage progress. The Irish Ambassador in Addis Ababa has visited Juba on a number of occasions, including most recently last month, where she met with key government, UN, NGO, Red Cross and diplomatic partners.Two Departmental officials have been seconded to the European External Action Service mission in Juba.

In addition, Ireland is responding to the continuing humanitarian need in South Sudan, with over €61 million in humanitarian assistance provided since 2012. Over €10 million in Irish funding has been provided so far this year, most recently to the South Sudan Humanitarian Fund and to UNICEF to assist their responses to a worsening humanitarian situation. Irish funding supports those in need inside South Sudan and South Sudanese refugees in neighbouring countries.

Western Balkans Issues

35. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on the situation in Macedonia; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40829/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): On 30 September, Macedonian citizens had the opportunity to vote on the Prespa Agreement, which was signed on 17 June by the Greek and Macedonian Foreign Ministers and proposes changing the name of the country to the Republic of North Macedonia, potentially ending a dispute between the two neighbours that has lasted for decades. I want to commend those who voted in the consultative referendum, and acknowledge the political leadership and courage shown by the Macedonian and Greek governments in coming to an agreement on the issue.

It was a peaceful and democratic vote, in which 94% of votes cast were in favour of the Agreement. This represents a positive result, despite the turnout being low at 37%. A threshold of 50% turnout is required if the outcome of a Macedonian referendum is to be regarded as legally binding. However, as the referendum was only consultative in nature, failure to reach this threshold does not prevent politicians in Skopje from pressing ahead with the Prespa Agreement. The Agreement must now be ratified by the parliaments of both countries, beginning with the Macedonian Assembly, if it is to enter into force and if the proposed name change is to become effective. As such, it is now in the hands of parliamentarians in Skopje to decide on a way forward which can command broad support in the wake of this result. I would urge them to engage constructively with each other now and seize this historic opportunity. The successful resolution of this issue will not only set a much-needed example for reconciliation in the region, but will also decisively move the country forward on its European path.

Ireland continues to be a strong supporter of Skopje's European perspective, and indeed of the European perspective of the Western Balkans region as a whole. We were pleased to see the European Commission begin the initial preparatory work in Macedonia's accession process in late September, following the Council's decision to set out the path towards opening negotiations in June 2019. We hope that momentum can be maintained in the process over the coming months.

International Election Monitoring

36. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the result of the election monitoring panel competition which closed on 20 August 2018; the number of monitors nominated; the way in which his Department will conduct competitions in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40865/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): I refer the Deputy to the response to a previous parliamentary question on this matter, Question 69 of 7 September 2018, as well as to responses to the following related parliamen-

tary questions: Questions 103 and 104 of 24 July 2018, Questions 57 and 58 of 3 July 2018, Question 107 of 24 April 2018 and Question 16 of 25 January 2018. The call for applications to establish a new election observation roster was issued on 2 July. A total of 395 applications were received by the deadline of 17.30 on the 20 August 2018.

All applications were subject to screening to confirm that they met the essential criteria, as set out in the Volunteer Information Booklet.

The appraisal process has not yet been concluded. Training is now being put in place for the appraisal panels which will assess all those applications which met the aforementioned essential criteria. Language proficiency will also be verified. Once the appraisal process is complete, prior to being placed on the roster all successful applicants will be required to undergo vetting by An Garda Síochána or the appropriate policing authority.

As the current process remains ongoing, no consideration has been given at this stage as how future replenishments of the election observation roster would be managed.

UN Security Council

37. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which he has identified support for Ireland's case for nomination to the UN Security Council, further to his recent address to the UN General Assembly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40898/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Ireland is seeking election to a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council in June 2020 for the 2021-2022 term. Ireland's candidacy was announced in 2005.

The campaign leading up to 2020 is already well under way. I am using every opportunity during bi-lateral contacts and meetings to press the value of Ireland playing a strong and independent role on the Council. In addition, my Department's diplomatic staff in Ireland, our Permanent Representation to the UN in New York, and our entire Embassy network have been actively presenting our case and seeking support.

Each year, Ireland attends the United Nations General Assembly held at UN Headquarters in New York. This is the largest gathering of Heads of State and Government and Ministers in the UN calendar.

The 73rd session of the UN General Assembly got underway in early September.

The theme for this year's General Debate was "Making the United Nations relevant to all people: global leadership and shared responsibilities for peaceful, equitable and sustainable societies".

I delivered Ireland's National Statement to the General Debate in which I emphasised Ireland's strong support for multilateralism as the best way to address global problems. It is my firm view, which I believe is shared across the Oireachtas, that a collective effort is the only way to address global challenges such as conflict, migration and climate change, which are often linked.

The statement offered the opportunity to highlight Ireland's role in UN peacekeeping, disarmament and humanitarian assistance, and to highlight Ireland's concerns regarding the situation in the Middle East.

While attending the UN General Assembly, An Taoiseach, Minister of State Cannon and I met with a large number of Heads of State and Government and Ministers from all regions. During these constructive bilateral engagements, we received a strong hearing. Ireland's track record at the UN is widely respected as is our sense of Empathy, Partnership and Independence which are hallmarks of our Security Council campaign. We face strong competition in the election for two non-permanent seats on the Security Council from Canada and Norway, two States which we highly respect and with which we work closely at the UN.

Through all of our interactions in recent days, and the extensive range of meetings which will take place over the coming 20 months, UN Member States will be very aware that Ireland will continue our strong efforts for election to the Security Council.

Passport Applications Fees

38. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the standard fee for passports for persons who have been employed and self-employed for over four decades here will be waived; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40987/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The cost of the standard ten year adult Irish passport compares favourably with many other jurisdictions. At a cost of €80, which breaks down to €8 per year, the Irish passport fee compares with approximately €8.60 per year for a British passport, €8.60 per year for a French passport, €9.60 per year for renewal of an American passport and €17.20 per year for an Australian passport.

Given that any shortfall in revenue or additional costs would have to be met by the taxpayer, I do not have any plans at this time to reduce the application fee for any category of adult passport.

Citizenship Applications

39. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the charge is the same for citizenship for persons who apply from outside the EU. [40988/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The fees for citizenship through entry on the Foreign Births Register are set out in Statutory Instrument number 47/2013 - Foreign Births Regulations 2013, which provides for fees as follows:

Under 18 Registration: €125 + €20.00 for the certificate

Over 18 Registration: €250 + €20.00 for the certificate

These fees are uniform irrespective of where a person applies from. A non-refundable postage and handling fee of €8 is also charged.

Since November 2016, it has been possible to make online payments when applying for Foreign Birth Registration. However, at a number of missions (Embassy Abuja, Embassy Addis Ababa, Embassy Dar Es Salaam, Embassy Freetown, Embassy Nairobi, Embassy Maputo, Embassy Malawi, and Honorary Consulate Auckland), payments must be made directly.

Diplomatic Representation

40. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has given consideration to opening an embassy in Georgia as part of expanding Ireland's global footprint; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40989/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Embassy of Ireland in Sofia, Bulgaria is accredited on a non-residential basis to Georgia. Ireland enjoys excellent relations with Georgia.

With the launch of 'Global Ireland: Ireland's Global Footprint to 2025', the Government is committed to doubling the scope and impact of Ireland's global footprint in the period ahead, while also continuously reviewing the scale of Ireland's overseas network.

In considering expanding our diplomatic representation overseas, a range of factors is taken into account including our national political, economic and trade priorities, as well as the availability of resources.

There are currently no plans to open an Embassy in Tbilisi.

Passport Applications

41. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if a passport application by a person (details supplied) will be expedited; the target and turnaround time for passport applications; if turnaround times are regularly relayed to post office staff; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41013/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application for the individual named was registered with the Passport Service on the 2 October 2018. The Passport Service has been in touch with the applicant regarding the latest status of his application and has explained what is required to allow his application be processed as quickly as possible.

The Passport Service aims to process all passport applications submitted via Passport Express within 15 working days. At present, renewal applications through Passport Express are being processed in an average time of 10 working days, excluding postage time.

The fastest way for applicants to apply for a passport renewal is using the Online Passport Renewal Service. Target turnaround time for applications made via the online service is 10 working days plus postage. Current average processing time is 8 working days, and over 50% of applicants who have used this channel this year have had their application processed within a week. The online service currently accommodates only adult renewals and passport card applications, but it is planned to further extend this service to child renewals by the end of 2018.

The Passport Service continues to work closely with the Communications Unit of An Post to ensure that information disseminated by An Post staff is accurate and up to date. Turnaround times for all categories of applicants are regularly published on www.dfa.ie/passports.

Passport Applications Fees

42. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the estimated amount it would cost in a full year if the passport application fee was reduced to €60 for persons over 75 years of age based on 2017 figures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41021/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Based on 2017 application volumes, the Passport Service has calculated the potential annual cost of reducing the passport application fee to €60 for applicants over 75 years of age to be just under half a million euros.

The cost of the standard ten year adult Irish passport compares favourably with many other jurisdictions. At a cost of €80, which breaks down to €8 per year, the Irish passport fee compares with approximately €8.60 per year for a British passport, €8.60 per year for a French passport, €9.60 per year for renewal of an American passport and €17.20 per year for an Australian passport.

Given that any shortfall in revenue for such a subsidy would have to be met by the taxpayer, I do not have any plans at this time to waive or reduce the application fee for any category of adult passport.

UN Conferences

43. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the regulation of transnational corporations and other business enterprises in international law will be elaborated in advance of the fourth session of the UN Intergovernmental Working Group; his views on the development of a UN treaty on business and human rights in view of the fact this regulation will complement a national action plan on business and human rights; and the way in which his Department will contribute to this session in Geneva. [41113/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): A number of developing countries, led by Ecuador and South Africa, have proposed the elaboration of an internationally legally binding instrument on Transnational Corporations and other Business Enterprises and in this regard an Inter-Governmental Working Group was established in 2014 on foot of a resolution of the Human Rights Council.

The next session of the Inter-Governmental Working Group is scheduled to take place in Geneva from 15-19 October. Ireland and our EU partners are looking at how we might actively and constructively engage in the session notwithstanding some serious concerns about the way in which the work of the Group has been conducted to date. In the first instance, we agree with the view expressed by countries across all regions on the need to revert to the Human Rights Council for a new resolution following the completion of three sessions of the Inter-Governmental Working Group. Furthermore, the Programme of Work for any future sessions, including possible speakers, should be negotiated in coordination with regional and other groups. The nomination of the Chairperson and the conduct of proceedings should be in accordance with the principles set out in the Rules of Procedure of the General Assembly, including impartiality and respect for the rights of minorities as well as majorities. We also think it is essential that the participation of all stakeholders including civil society, trade unions and business should be facilitated.

We have noted with interest the zero draft of a legally binding instrument to regulate, in international human rights law, the activities of transnational corporations and other business enterprises circulated in July by the Ecuadorean Permanent Representative in Geneva. Ireland is open to looking at options for progress on a legally binding Treaty, which we believe should treat all economic operators in a non-discriminatory manner and should therefore cover companies engaged in purely domestic operations as well as transnational corporations.

We would wish to see essential human rights principles reflected in any possible instrument,

which should reaffirm the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of human rights and stress the primary responsibility of States under existing human rights obligations to protect against human rights violations.

Ultimately, if it is to achieve its objectives, any legally binding instrument should enjoy broad support among UN Member States to ensure its effectiveness as well as international coherence in the framework of business and human rights. We would like to see any new initiative build on, rather than duplicate, existing measures such as the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises and the ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles Concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy. Above all we believe that it should be rooted in the UN Guiding Principles. In this regard, we are of the view that the appropriate place for the discussion of any new initiatives is the annual UN Forum on Business and Human Rights, which was established in 2011 by the Human Rights Council to serve as a global platform to discuss trends and challenges in the implementation of the Guiding Principles.

Syrian Conflict

44. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to a report on the Syrian conflict (details supplied); his views on the recommendations of the report; if, in view of the report's contents, he will reiterate his concerns about Russian involvement in the conflict with the diplomatic mission here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41150/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am all too aware of the awful human suffering caused by the Syria conflict. There has clearly been a pattern of deliberate and indiscriminate attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure by the Syrian regime and its allies, as we saw in Eastern Ghouta earlier this year. These acts are reprehensible and in direct contravention of international humanitarian law and I have made my views clear in this House and in various international fora. Atrocities have also been committed by groups such as ISIS in the course of this conflict, and my condemnation of those acts is also on record.

Russia is in no doubt of Ireland's position: our concerns have been raised with the Russian authorities directly on numerous occasions at Ministerial and official level. Last October, I met with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Titov and reiterated that Ireland condemns in the strongest terms the ongoing attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, and the use of chemical weapons. I also called on Russia to ensure civilians are protected, and to exert its influence on other parties to the conflict to do the same. I, and my officials, will continue to raise our concerns with the Russian authorities, at every appropriate opportunity.

In relation to the recommendations in the report to which the Deputy refers, key themes are accountability and effective multilateral action.

Ireland has consistently called for the referral of the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court. We take every appropriate opportunity to speak out against human rights abuses in Syria in UN and other international fora. At the last meeting of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva in September 2018, Ireland co-sponsored a resolution on the human rights situation in Syria which condemned the continued and deliberate targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure, including the use of chemical weapons against civilians, the denial and diversion of humanitarian aid and medical assistance, and the use of starve or surrender tactics that we have repeatedly seen in Syria.

Ireland and the EU also provide political and financial support to a broad range of measures which aim to ensure full legal accountability for all war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Syria. For example, we are supportive of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria established by the UN Human Rights Council. In 2017, Ireland provided €100,000 in financial support to the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) established by the UN General Assembly. The IIIM aims to assist in the investigation and prosecution of persons responsible for the most serious crimes under international law committed in Syria.

In addition to our core contributions to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Ireland has contributed €200,000 specifically to the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mission to eliminate chemical weapons in Syria. In June 2018, Ireland co-sponsored the decision adopted by the State Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention introducing an attribution mechanism to identify the perpetrators of chemical weapons attacks in Syria and elsewhere.

In addition, Ireland has consistently supported EU sanctions targeting the Assad regime and its supporters, and will continue to do so as long as the situation on the ground justifies these measures.

Ireland and the EU firmly believe that there can be no military solution to the Syria crisis and support the UN-led efforts to bring about a comprehensive, sustainable and inclusive resolution of the crisis.

Ministerial Communications

45. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if there is a policy regarding ministerial use of private email for Government business in his Department; and if so, if it will be published. [41524/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The ICT Unit of the Department provides a secure email service and the Department's ICT Security Policy governs the use of the email system for all staff, contractors, agents and third parties. There is no stand-alone policy governing Ministerial use of private email and therefore the issue of publication does not arise. I use my Departmental secure email account for confidential official business.

Vehicle Registration

46. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance the records of registration that are kept in respect of ownership of motorbikes, scramblers and other off-road vehicles; the location in which these records are kept; the agency charged with administering such records; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40733/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Vehicles are registered by Revenue under the provisions of the Finance Act 1992, Part II, Chapter IV. Motorcycles, scramblers and other off-road vehicles must be registered if they are designed and constructed for road use and as such have type approval under the EU system of classification for vehicles. Vehicles which are not designed and constructed for road use cannot be registered under the above mentioned provisions.

The registration record produced when a vehicle is registered includes data in relation to the vehicle and data in respect of the person registering the vehicle. With regards to the vehicle, the data captured is based on the vehicle's Certificate of Conformity in the case of new vehicles or the previous registration document in the case of used vehicles. Some data, such as the Vehicle Identification Number, is common to all vehicles and other data captured will depend on the type of vehicle (e.g. a passenger car, a bus, a heavy commercial). In relation to the person registering the vehicle, Revenue captures the name and address of the person and, in the case of used vehicles, the PPSN.

The vehicle and personal data (except for the PPSN) is transmitted on a daily basis to the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, which maintains the National Vehicle Driver File and records changes in ownership.

Farm Household Incomes

47. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Finance if an extension of income averaging can be made available to all sectors with regard to income volatility experienced by many farmers from year to year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40826/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Decisions on taxation matters, including decisions (if any) in relation to farm income stabilisation measures, are made in the context of the annual Budget process. The Deputy will understand that I cannot give any indications of my plans in advance of the Budget speech later today.

Tax Compliance

48. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Finance if a person (details supplied) is on the correct rate of tax with regard to their pension. [40618/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that it has recently reviewed the tax affairs of the person in question and is satisfied, based on the information on record, that their rate of tax is correct.

Revenue will however make direct contact with the person to determine if their circumstances have changed in any way that could impact on their rate of tax.

Oireachtas Banking Inquiry

49. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the progress made on implementing each recommendation of the banking inquiry with relevance to his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40631/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I will address the Deputy's question in relation to the progress made on implementing each recommendation of the Banking Inquiry with relevance to my Department by firstly explaining the broader changes that have occurred since the crisis, and then going into detail on the progress on implementing the recommendations of relevance to the Department of Finance. I am pleased to report that the recommendations have either been implemented or otherwise addressed.

Since the financial crisis, there has been a significant number of measures taken to address

the failures highlighted in the post-crisis analysis. This includes measures to address the recommendations of the Banking Inquiry. These have been at an institutional, national, and EU level. Both the Department of Finance and the Central Bank of Ireland have undergone significant organisational change in terms of structure, culture and resources.

There has also been a large amount of new legislation introduced at a national and EU level to address the weaknesses that came to light during and after the crisis.

The former Central Bank of Ireland and the Irish Financial Services Regulatory Authority have been re-amalgamated into one body, the Central Bank of Ireland (the Central Bank). The approach to banking supervision has radically changed to one that is more assertive, risk-based, and challenging, and one which is underpinned by new legislation, predominantly the Central Bank Reform Act 2010 and the Central Bank Supervision and Enforcement Act 2013.

The Department of Finance has implemented the recommendations of the 'Wright Report'; it has restructured its divisions; and it has implemented an open recruitment policy to ensure an optimum skills mix. The Department's objectives are to ensure a sustainable macroeconomic environment and sound public finances, with a balanced and equitable economy, enabled by a restructured, vibrant, secure, and well-regulated financial sector.

The establishment of the State's Financial Stability Group has facilitated and strengthened communication and coordination between the State institutions i.e. the Central Bank, the Department of Finance and the National Treasury Management Agency.

National regulatory measures have been complemented by EU-wide reforms and new legislation. In the EU, the Banking Union has been put in place, thus implementing the commitment of the European Council in June 2012 to break the bank/sovereign link.

The EU Banking Union provides for a single prudential supervisor through the Single Supervisory Mechanism (SSM), a single rulebook, and a Single Resolution Mechanism (SRM). This aims to improve coordination and militate against negative spill-over in the future. The European Systemic Risk Board (ESRB) is responsible for the macro-prudential oversight of the EU financial system and the prevention and mitigation of systemic risk. The ESRB monitors and assesses systemic risks and, where appropriate, issues warnings and recommendations.

There have also been economic and fiscal reforms at an EU level. The Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) was strengthened following the adoption of the 'six pack' legislative package in 2012. The reformed SGP is now complemented by a new surveillance mechanism which ensures that macroeconomic imbalances, as well as debt and deficit targets, are monitored. This mechanism, the Macroeconomic Imbalance Procedure (MIP) should ensure that emerging imbalances, such as housing bubbles, are detected at an earlier stage and acted upon.

I now refer specifically to the recommendations of the Banking Inquiry that are relevant to my Department. The majority have been implemented or else the recommendations have been otherwise addressed. Some recommendations refer to ongoing or periodic reviews, and these are continuing.

Review of section 33AK of the Central Bank Act 1942:

- A review of section 33 AK is occurring as part of the forthcoming Central Bank (Amendment) Bill. The Central Bank is assisting in this review.

- It is important to consider that the ability to disclose to a judge will depend on the legal mandate of the particular inquiry, the nature of the particular documentation under consideration and the EU law provision (where relevant) applicable. Any proposed amendment to sec-

tion 33 AK will also require prior consultation with the ECB.

The membership of the Board of the Central Bank, appointed by Government, must include sufficient expertise and relevant direct experience in financial stability and prudential regulation:

- The current members of the Central Bank Commission were all appointed after the financial crisis, and possess the relevant knowledge and experience as is statutorily required.

- Any future members will be appointed from an open competition under the remit of the Public Appointments Service, following the guidelines for appointments to State Boards.

Establish a formal process with clear procedures for situations where there are conflicts between the advice provided by the Department of Finance on matters where exceptional risks are involved and the decision proposed by the Minister:

- While this recommendation is specific to the Department of Finance, the Corporate Governance Standards for the Civil Service, published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in 2015, requires that all Departments and Offices have in place a published Governance Framework that, inter alia, should "set out the formal processes and mechanisms for documenting decisions made within the Department to include Ministerial consideration and filing of same", (p.13).

- In the Department of Finance, all submissions and advice to the Minister are recorded on an E-submissions system. This allows the Department to fully document its advice on matters where exceptional risks are involved, while respecting the constitutional and existing legislative frameworks, and the ultimate decision proposed by the Minister.

The banking division in the Department of Finance should be periodically subjected to a performance review by an independent third party to ensure fiscal, capital market, and banking expertise is adequate to challenge information and assumptions provided to it by the Central Bank of Ireland:

- The Department, as a whole, is subject to the capability review programme as part of the Civil Service Renewal Plan. The capability review process assesses relevant Department attributes such as the structural capability of the Department, including its strategic HR, learning and development, and culture and values. The review is undertaken by a Review Team based in the Reform and Delivery Office of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

In addition, the Department and the Banking Division are subjected to regular review through:

- Annual Oireachtas oversight and scrutiny of the Department's resources and outputs;

- IMF periodic reviews of the Department's role in financial policy and regulatory matters, such as the IMF Financial Sector Assessment Programme conducted in 2016; and

- Periodic performance reviews of the Department, such as the Wright report.

Specifically, the Department has taken actions to improve the fiscal, capital market and banking expertise in the Department and the Banking Division through:

- Professional Diplomas in Financial Services and Government Economics have been developed by the Department in conjunction with the Institute of Banking and the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) respectively.

- These measures help ensure Departmental staff possess the necessary skills and knowledge to perform their duties effectively.

- Increased recruitment of economists, and financial and capital market experts into the Department to assist in the analysis and challenge of financial and economic data.

- The Shareholding and Financial Advisory Division (SFAD) is comprised of circa 18 civil servants and secondees from the National Treasury Management Agency with extensive private sector expertise and professional qualifications in: capital markets (debt and equity), corporate finance/investment banking, accounting and auditing, and law.

- The Department has regular interaction with investment bankers, analysts, lawyers, accountants, tax advisers, investment funds, private equity funds, stockbrokers etc. so as to ensure that the Department has access to up to date market information and intelligence across a wide range of subjects.

Acceptable bands should be agreed with regard to the proportion of total State taxation revenue accounted for by defined cyclical, transaction-based taxes, including triggers for follow-up action when these limits are breached:

- The objective of ensuring that cyclical or windfall revenue is not used to fund permanent increases in public expenditure has already been addressed through reforms introduced in the Stability and Growth Pact and the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance. In particular, the issue is addressed by the expenditure benchmark, which limits the growth in general government expenditure to the trend growth rate of the economy unless discretionary revenue measures are introduced to fund higher increases.

- Also, in line with Government policy, and subsequent to the SGP reforms mentioned above, the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council was established and given the function of monitoring compliance with the fiscal rules, assessing the official forecasts and whether the fiscal stance is conducive to prudent economic and budgetary management, including by reference to the Stability and Growth Pact.

- The introduction of the Rainy Day Fund will allow for cyclical revenues to be paid into the Fund to ensure such revenues are not used towards current expenditure.

Legislation governing the powers of the Minister for Finance relating to directions to the NTMA should be reviewed:

- The issue of Ministerial directions to the National Treasury Management Agency, as provided for under Section 4 (4) of the NTMA Act 1990 and elsewhere in the NTMA's legislation, was reviewed since the period dealt with by the Inquiry's report. The preparations of the NTMA (Amendment) Act 2014 involved a thorough review of Ministerial powers including directions to the NTMA. The issue was also discussed at length as part of the Committee Stage and following reflection the Department, the Minister and the Oireachtas were satisfied that the existing provisions were measured and appropriate.

- It is important to note that the NTMA's treasury functions, such as borrowing on behalf of the State and managing the national debt, are delegated to the Agency by the Minister for Finance under the NTMA Act 1990, as amended, so these remain primarily responsibilities of the Minister for which he/she is accountable.

The operation and effectiveness of NAMA should continue to be reviewed, in particular when medium term property price movements can be taken into account. When NAMA completes its work, it should be the subject of a further comprehensive and final review:

- In line with the recommendation, NAMA is kept under review. The C&AG carries out ongoing and ex-post reports on NAMA's performance. Both the Department and the C&AG continue to review NAMA during its lifetime and would envisage carrying out such a report once NAMA has completed its work.

- Carrying on from the 2014 Section 227 report, the Department of Finance continues to develop its views regarding NAMA's strategy and continues to monitor NAMA's performance relative to the market and expectations. One key element of this ongoing analysis is the comparison of NAMA's outturn to changes in the value in asset classes and geographies in which NAMA holds assets. These ongoing analyses will continue to assist in the Department's evaluation of NAMA's strategy regarding its remaining portfolio, including the future strategic direction around the Dublin Docklands SDZ development and the strategy around the Residential Funding Programme.

- In addition to ongoing work, the Department fully intends to perform a comprehensive review of NAMA once its work is complete. Section 227 of the NAMA Act requires that, as soon as may be after 31 December 2012, and every 5 years after that while NAMA continues to be in existence, the Minister assess whether NAMA has made progress towards achieving its overall objectives, and decides whether continuation of NAMA is necessary, having regard to the purposes of this Act. In addition, the Minister may also, at any time, have NAMA report to him or her regarding progress on the achievement of NAMA's purposes.

- Similar to Section 227, Section 226 of the NAMA Act required as soon as may be after 31 December 2012, and every 3 years thereafter while NAMA continues to be in existence, that the C&AG shall assess the extent to which NAMA has made progress toward achieving its overall objectives.

- The next Section 227 Report is due in 2019. Under Section 227, the Minister also has the power to effect an off-schedule Section 227 report at a time that coincides with the achievement of NAMA's purposes under the Act. It is envisaged that the final report conducted under this section of the Act will make final conclusions regarding NAMA's achievement of its overall objectives - essentially a comprehensive review which will be performed at or very close to such time as NAMA has completed its work.

The European Commission's recommendations on audit changes for banking should be implemented:

- Legislation signed into law on 17th June 2016 giving effect to the new EU regulatory framework on statutory audit (Statutory Instrument 312/2016, entitled European Union (Statutory Audits) (Directive 2006/42/EC, as amended by Directive 2014/56/EU, and Regulation (EU) No 537/2014) Regulations, 2016) aims to achieve a high level of harmonisation of statutory audit requirements and a common regulatory approach across the EU.

- The legislation widens the remit of the Irish Auditing and Accountancy Supervisory Authority (IAASA). IAASA will now be directly responsible for the inspection of the audits of Public Interest Entities (PIEs), such as credit institutions, insurance companies and entities listed on regulated stock exchanges. The new measures address this recommendation and also include notable changes to the regulatory regime for auditors, particularly for the audits of PIEs.

Literacy Programmes

50. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance the involvement of his Department in tackling adult literacy; if a financial allocation is provided for same; if so, the way in

which it is utilised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40682/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My Department has no specific financial allocation provided for tackling adult literacy.

As part of Public Service Reform, our colleagues in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform promoted the use of plain English and provided plain English language training courses in 2016, for staff in other Departments. All learning materials undertaken by One Learning, the Civil Service Learning and Development shared service, are completed with reference to the National Disability Authority's Accessibility Toolkit - Making Information More Accessible.

Imports and Exports Data

51. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will address a matter raised in correspondence (details supplied) regarding import and export statistics; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40705/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that it provides statistical information on the movement of goods into and out of Ireland to the Central Statistics Office (CSO), based on Intrastat returns made by traders. The Revenue Commissioners also carries out follow up queries with traders where requested to do so by the CSO. The CSO is responsible for analysing the data and making the information publicly available.

Occasionally, Intrastat returns include inaccuracies, such as incorrect reporting of commodity codes by traders. Following a request from the CSO for a review of figures that were included in a report sent by it to the person in question, Revenue discovered that a trader had used an incorrect commodity code to report the export of another product as being an export of radiators. This resulted in the report on the volume of exported radiators being inflated. The CSO was informed of the error on 24 July 2018.

The Revenue Commissioners has advised me that it is working with the CSO to correct the data as quickly as possible. The CSO will then ensure that the revised information is provided directly to the person in question.

Tax Avoidance

52. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance the plans he and the Revenue Commissioners have to address the loss of tax revenue through tax avoidance schemes outlined in the Comptroller and Auditor General's annual report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40743/18]

53. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the September 2018 annual report by the Comptroller and Auditor General, which found that a quarter of 140 high-net-worth individuals had taxable income of less than the average industrial wage and that 90 taxpayers in this group paid income tax at a lower rate than that paid by the average taxpayer; the action he will take on foot of the report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40744/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 52 and 53 together.

It is Revenue's role to ensure compliance with tax legislation and to collect the correct tax due based on taxable income determined in accordance with tax legislation. This requires taxpayers to submit annual tax returns of their income and gains to Revenue.

The Deputy will be aware that the findings in the Annual Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) include references to the taxable income of high wealth individuals (HWIs) and the rate of income tax paid by these taxpayers. Both taxable income and income tax payable are determined in accordance with tax legislation which include the availability of reliefs and tax credits. Such credits and reliefs where applicable have, as stated by the C&AG in his report, the effect of reducing the tax liability of an individual for any given year of assessment. As also stated by the C&AG in his report, while high earners are well placed to utilise the wide variety of credits and reliefs available, they may also be liable to pay additional tax by virtue of their high income in the form of the domicile levy and the high income earners restriction.

I am advised by Revenue that it has had a particular focus on HWIs over a long period. HWIs have been managed by dedicated units with its Large Cases Division since it was established in 2003. Dedicated case managers are responsible for profiling, risk assessment and compliance activities for HWIs within their case base and Revenue's Anti-Avoidance Unit operates within the HWI Units. Revenue has recently split its Large Cases Division into two divisions, one of which will now focus on HWIs, avoidance and pensions. This structural realignment is being supported by an expansion in the number of specialist and experienced staff assigned to the oversight of the new Division's case base.

I am satisfied that the structural realignment being advanced by Revenue combined with the mandatory disclosure regime which applies to marketers, promoters and users of 'disclosable' transactions and the use by Revenue of the powers available to tackle tax avoidance and tackle schemes that involve contrived, artificial transactions that are designed purely to produce a tax advantage for the taxpayer will continue to deliver an outcome where HWIs pay the appropriate tax in accordance with the legislation. I am also assured by Revenue that in line with its comprehensive risk assessment programmes, there is appropriate examination and evaluation of the tax returns submitted by HWIs and where necessary compliance interventions are undertaken to verify the accuracy of the returns. Where under-declarations of income or gains are identified or where tax avoidance activity is identified, Revenue will be relentless in its action in such cases and take whatever action is necessary to recover all taxes legally due together with associated interest, penalties and surcharges where relevant.

Furthermore, the High Earners Restriction, which aims to limit the use of certain tax reliefs and exemptions by those on high incomes, is meeting its objective.

As detailed in the recently published Revenue report on the operation of the High Income Earners Restriction, in 2016 some 149 high-income individuals with an adjusted income of €400,000 or more (i.e. where the restriction fully applied) paid an average effective tax rate of 30.1% on the combination of adjusted income and ring-fenced income. The additional tax collected from these 149 taxpayers was €25.8 million, representing an increase of 175% on the tax that would otherwise have been paid if the restriction had not applied. An important outcome of the restriction is that 54 individuals with adjusted incomes of €400,000 or more, who would not otherwise have paid tax in 2016, were brought into the tax net for that year.

The 2016 report also shows that 372 high-income individuals with an adjusted income of up to €400,000 (i.e. where the restriction applied on a graduated basis) paid an average effective tax rate of 19.09% on the combination of adjusted income and ring-fenced income. When the USC is included, the average tax rate is 28.61%. The additional tax collected from these 451

taxpayers was €12.7 million, representing an increase of 242% on the tax that would otherwise have been paid if the restriction had not applied. Some 164 individuals with adjusted incomes of up to €400,000, who would not otherwise have paid tax in 2016, were brought into the tax net for that year, as a result of the restriction.

The performance of this measure is noted by the C&AG in the recent report. The report notes the relatively high effective tax rate on income earned by high wealth individuals (which in 2015 was 39.2% compared with an average tax rate of 16.3% for all taxpayers).

Tax Data

54. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost of all tax expenditure inclusive of the domicile levy and all other tax reliefs and credits; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40745/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the available information in respect of the cost of tax expenditures (credits, allowances and reliefs) is published on Revenue's statistics webpage at https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/tax-expenditures/costs-expenditures.aspx.

My Department also publishes its own Report on Tax Expenditures each year, and I expect that the 2018 version will be published with the Budget 2019 documents today at www.gov.ie/budget.

I am also advised by Revenue that as the domicile levy is an annual charge of €200,000 levied and paid by relevant individuals, it is not a tax expenditure. It is payable by Irish domiciled persons with Irish situated property that is valued at greater than €5m, worldwide income that is in excess of €1m and Irish income tax in a year that was less than €200,000. The amount of the domicile levy may be offset against any Irish income tax arising for a relevant year of assessment.

The following table sets out the number of persons who have filed Domicile Levy returns and the amount collected since commencement. Returns for 2017 are due 31 October 2018.

Levy Year	Number of Returns	Amount Paid €million
2010	32	3.4
2011	33	3.9
2012	27	3.0
2013	20	2.1
2014	13	2.0
2015	13	2.4
2016	10	1.4
Total	148	18.2

Disabled Drivers and Passengers Scheme

55. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to review the qualifying criteria for the disabled drivers and disabled passengers scheme; the primary medical certificate which underpins it; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40773/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As you may be aware, the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Scheme provides relief from VAT and VRT

(up to a certain limit) on the purchase of an adapted car for transport of a person with specific severe and permanent physical disabilities, payment of a fuel grant, and an exemption from Motor Tax.

To qualify for the Scheme an applicant must be in possession of a Primary Medical Certificate. To qualify for a Primary Medical Certificate, an applicant must be permanently and severely disabled within the terms of the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Regulations 1994 and satisfy one of the following conditions:

- be wholly or almost wholly without the use of both legs;

- be wholly without the use of one leg and almost wholly without the use of the other leg such that the applicant is severely restricted as to movement of the lower limbs;

- be without both hands or without both arms;

- be without one or both legs;

- be wholly or almost wholly without the use of both hands or arms and wholly or almost wholly without the use of one leg;

- have the medical condition of dwarfism and have serious difficulties of movement of the lower limbs.

The Scheme represents a significant tax expenditure. Between the Vehicle Registration Tax and VAT foregone, and the fuel grant, the scheme cost c €65m in each of 2016 and 2017. This figure does not include the revenue foregone in respect of the relief from Motor Tax provided to members of the Scheme.

Given the scale and scope of the scheme, I have no plans to amend the qualifying medical criteria at this time.

Budget 2019

56. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated structural balance in 2019 for every €100 million spent in excess of the €800 million outlined in the summer economic statement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40774/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I can advise the Deputy that all else being equal, each €100 million will worsen the structural balance by c. 0.03 percentage points.

As I have said previously, this is money that we would have to borrow. With public debt in Ireland among the highest per capita in the developed world the focus must be on decreasing, rather than increasing, our debt level.

My Department recently published its '*Annual Report on Public Debt in Ireland 2018'* which provides a comprehensive analysis of debt dynamics. The report clearly demonstrates the importance of continued prudent management of the public finances. It is crucial that we continue to stabilise the level of debt in Ireland and, subsequently, put it on a downward trajectory - this has been and will continue to be a key priority for Government.

By reducing the burden of debt we will minimise the exposure of, and risks to, the economy.

NAMA Operations

57. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Finance if NAMA has interests, current or historical, in lands or debts connected to the current difficulties of a company (details supplied); and the detail of these interests and transactions, including dealings connected with the company or other companies. [40796/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised that the company to which the Deputy refers was engaged by a receiver to undertake the construction of a residential development over which NAMA holds security. I am advised that the construction of the current phase of development has been completed. I am advised that the development is controlled by a receiver and the construction work on the site is governed by a contract between the receiver and the company, to which NAMA is not a party. Accordingly, the receiver is responsible for any engagement with the company.

The Deputy will be aware that I, as Minister for Finance, have no role in respect of NAMA's commercial operations or decisions, or those of its debtors and receivers. It would not therefore be appropriate for me to comment further on this matter.

Credit Union Services

58. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the progress made on the confidence and supply commitment to develop a strategy for the growth and development of the credit union sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40877/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Government has a clear policy to support the strategic growth and development of credit unions delivering the comprehensive recommendations set out in the Commission on Credit Unions Report and the Credit Union Advisory Committee (CUAC) report in 2016, both of which involved extensive stakeholder engagement. CUAC remains an important adviser to me on strategic issues facing the sector, and the safety of members' savings and the security of the credit union sector as a whole are priorities for this Government.

Since 2011 my Department has put in place a number of measures to assist the credit union sector. These measures include:

- establishment of the Commission on Credit Unions in 2011;

- publication of the Credit Union and Co-operation with Overseas Regulators Act 2012;

- establishment of the Credit Union Restructuring Board, ReBo, which oversaw 82 restructuring projects involving 156 credit unions during its lifetime: these newly merged credit unions are now better positioned to harness the efficiencies of their increased scale to prudently develop products and services that their members are looking for now, and into the future.

- availability of €250 million for voluntary restructuring of credit unions facilitated by ReBo;

- establishment of a stabilisation levy to support credit unions that are undercapitalised but are otherwise viable; and

- establishment of a Resolution Fund for the resolution of financial instability in, or an imminent serious threat to the financial stability of, a Credit Union, as well as the provision of €250 million in 2011 to meet resolution costs anticipated at the time.

More recently, on the basis of a CUAC recommendation, an Implementation Group was established to oversee and monitor the implementation of the CUAC Report's recommendations.

The group, which meets monthly, is chaired by my Department and consists of one member from each of the representative bodies, one member from the CUAC and a member from the Central Bank. This group is an important forum for key stakeholders in the Credit Union Sector and has submitted papers on long-term lending and consultation and engagement to the Central Bank and is currently finalising a paper on Tiered Regulation.

In addition, following consultation with the Credit Union sector, revised regulations for credit unions commenced on 1st March 2018 which make changes to the investment and liquidity requirements and allow for greater diversification of investment income, including provision for up to c. €700 million investment in Tier 3 Approved Housing Bodies via a regulated vehicle.

While there are challenges to returns arising from the low yield environment and low loan to asset ratios, the sector continues to show signs of improvement reflected in growth in new lending, delivering c 35% of all unsecured consumer lending in 2017, a decrease in the level of reported arrears and an increase in reserves. Total assets have increased consistently for many years and currently stand at approximately €17.5 billion.

The Central Bank is due to publish a Consultation Paper in Q4 2018, as part of its review of the current long term lending limits for Credit Unions which may facilitate improvement in loan to asset ratios.

Business model development is another challenge facing the sector and to this end the Central Bank has set up a dedicated Business Model Unit within the Registrar of Credit Unions and has developed initiatives such as the CEO forum to address key constraints to, and enablers for, business model development. Business model development is also a focus of the CUAC, and I have specifically requested the committee to review barriers to and supports for collaborative efforts as well as SME lending, linking with the outcomes of the Local Public Banking report.

This Government recognises the important role of credit unions as a volunteer co-operative movement and its priorities remain the protection of members' savings, the financial stability of credit unions and the sector overall. The Government is determined to continue to support a strengthened and growing credit union movement. Credit unions are member owned and it is these members, with support from their representative bodies, who ultimately are responsible for setting and implementing their own individual strategic plans, with appropriate support from Government, which reflect the diverse nature of credit unions be they urban or rural, large or small, industrial or community.

Fuel Laundering

59. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 83 of 3 July 2018, if his attention has been drawn to new techniques being employed by fuel smugglers utilising a form of distillation of diesel fuel that successfully removes the marker; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that a large tanker of diesel sludge was illegally dumped in Dundalk in recent weeks; if he will provide an increase in resources to capture those involved in fuel laundering; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40929/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that they recognise the serious threat that fuel fraud poses to legitimate business, consumers and the Exchequer and that tackling this criminal activity has been and remains a high priority.

The measures implemented by Revenue to tackle the problem of fuel fraud include the introduction of stringent supply chain controls and reporting requirements for fuel transactions

to minimise the scope for fraud and a programme of risk focused intelligence development and enforcement interventions involving fuel sampling. In addition, Revenue and HM Revenue and Customs in the United Kingdom undertook a joint initiative to find a new fiscal marker (Accutrace S10™) for use in marked fuels, which was introduced in Ireland and the United Kingdom from the beginning of April 2015. Accutrace S10™ is a colourless marker whose chemical properties are similar to those of diesel, rendering it resistant to conventional dye-washing laundering methods. All the indications are that the introduction of this new marker, together with the wide range of other measures taken to prevent and combat fraud, has had a major impact on the illicit fuel trade. Revenue has undertaken research to assess the impact of this strategy and published an analysis (available at http://www.revenue.ie/en/about/publications/oil-market-analysis.pdf) in January 2015 of oil market trends and, on the basis of a comparison of extrapolated pre-2013 trends with actual results for 2103 and 2014, estimated that the strategy pursued may have saved the Exchequer between €150 million and €200 million in 2014. Updated analysis published by Revenue (available at http://www.revenue.ie/en/about/publications/oil-market-2017.pdf) in April 2017 showed that the impact of Revenue's initiatives may be contributing to a further uplift in receipts from diesel of up to €35 million per annum (based on 2016 levels of trade).

Revenue is aware of attempts to remove the marker by using a distillation process. This involves heating the marked fuel to extremely high temperatures. This is a highly dangerous procedure, with significant physical health and safety implications for anyone involved. Revenue is arranging formal scientific analysis of fuel samples and equipment taken in the course of a recent operation to determine the nature and impact of any process to remove the fiscal marker. In the meantime, I am assured by Revenue that it remains very vigilant in relation to this and any other possible threats related to fuel fraud.

While it is very disappointing that incidents of illegal dumping of mineral oil waste still occur, I am advised that the level of this dumping is greatly reduced. I am further advised by Revenue that having regard to its overall level of resources, it is satisfied that it has the necessary resources and powers to undertake the appropriate range of interventions to tackle smuggling and tax evasion activities by those engaged in fuel fraud. I remain open to discussing with Revenue future requirements they may have as regards resources or powers to maximise their effectiveness in tackling fuel fraud.

Carbon Tax Implementation

60. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the fact that an increase in carbon tax on solid fuel in the forthcoming budget will lead to an increase in illicit trade in solid fuels to the detriment of legal business owners south of the Border; if his attention has been drawn further to the fact that such an increase would also lead to increased use of illegal polluting solid fuels purchased on the black market; if he will keep prices in line with pricing north of the Border; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40940/18]

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.

In relation to the issue of the illicit trade in solid fuels, as I, and my predecessor, have pointed out before, the collection of solid fuel carbon tax is heavily reliant on the regulatory regime covering the marketing, sale, distribution and burning of solid fuels in the State. This regulatory regime is operated by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment

and is enforced by local authorities. This regime, which imposes higher environmental standards on coal in the State than applies in Northern Ireland, enables local authorities to undertake enforcement action to prevent the sale or distribution of coal that does not meet our standards.

European Union Single Market constraints preclude the use of any cross-border movement controls in the administration of Solid Fuel Carbon Tax. Therefore, Revenue has no authority to stop vehicles and physically inspect loads of such fuel. Similarly, the transport or possession of solid fuels that originated in Northern Ireland are not, in themselves, Revenue offences and Revenue's officers have no authority to challenge such transportation or possession. It is important to note that liability to Solid Fuel Carbon Tax does not arise on the physical presence of the goods in the State, but on first supply in the State by the supplier who is obliged to register with Revenue, make a return and pay the tax. This return must be made one month after the two-month accounting period provided for in law.

I am advised that Revenue is in contact with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment to discuss the effectiveness of the regulatory regime for solid fuel and to explore how to improve matters in light of continuing concerns that fuel sourced from Northern Ireland is getting onto the market here, including the scope for cooperation to ensure improved compliance in the sector.

Insurance Costs

61. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Finance if further and detailed consideration will be given to the ongoing concerns of an association (details supplied) regarding exorbitant insurance costs and the overall level of awards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41026/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I note the attached press release of the Alliance for Insurance Reform to which the Deputy refers. I also welcome the recent statement of the Chief Justice on the Opening of the New Legal Year and his reference to consistency and proper calibration of injury awards which was made in the context of recently published Personal Injuries Commission (PIC) Report. This Report has made a number of important recommendations which I believe will improve the personal injury resolution framework in Ireland. This area of work is of particular importance to tackling the broader cost of insurance issue. The implementation of these PIC recommendations – along with those from the first PIC Report - will I believe contribute to a better functioning personal injury litigation system, and it is hoped that they will ultimately contribute to making insurance more affordable for the whole of society.

The Alliance for Insurance Reform has played an active role in highlighting the issue of the cost of insurance, particularly for businesses and voluntary organisations. My colleague Minister D'Arcy has formally met with the Alliance on a number of occasions, most recently on September 18th, and issues related to the Alliance's "10 asks" were discussed in some level of detail. At this meeting it was pointed out that many of these "10 asks" were considered by the Cost of Insurance Working Group in the course of producing its two reports, namely the Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance and the Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance. Indeed, a number of these measures are in the process of being implemented, such as amending section 8 of the Civil Liability and Courts Act 2004 and putting in place guidelines for the reporting of suspected personal injury fraud by insurers to the Gardaí. In respect of other issues put forward by the Alliance, such as changing the approach to calculating the Book of Quantum, the recommendations of the PIC that this country follows the example of judicial intervention which has occurred in Northern Ireland and in the UK, namely the introduction of

Judicial Guidelines for judges, is an important recognition of the role of the Judiciary in this area. On the issue of a legislative capping of awards, as Minister D'Arcy has clearly indicated previously, there are constitutional issues which need to be first considered, thus explaining why the Working Group has referred that matter to the Law Reform Commission for examination.

Finally, I think it is important that the focus of the Cost of Insurance Working Group continues to be on implementing the recommendations of its two Reports. As I have stated previously, I believe that the cumulative effects of the implementation of all the recommendations should include increased stability in the pricing of insurance for consumers and businesses and improved availability of insurance generally.

Budget 2019

62. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Finance if consideration will be given to the issues raised in a pre-budget submission by an association (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41181/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy will be aware that 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.

Pension Levy Yield

63. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Finance the yield from the private pension levy in each of the years in which it was applied; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41254/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am informed by Revenue that the yield for all relevant years from the Stamp Duty levy on pension schemes is as set in the following table.

Year	Yield €m
2011	463
2012	483
2013	535
2014	743
2015	169
Total	2,393

The levy has ceased since 2015.

Ministerial Communications

64. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Finance if there is a policy regarding ministerial use of private email for Government business in his Department; and if so, if it will be published. [41523/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Department of Finance does not have a specific policy in relation to the use of private email for Government business.

ICT services to the Department of Finance are provided by the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) under the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The Department has an Information and Communications Technology Acceptable Usage Policy in place that covers email usage. This policy addresses use of the Department ICT systems, including all communications, whether official or non-official. There is no access to non-departmental web based mail accounts from within the Department's network.

Official Engagements

65. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Finance if he and-or officials in his Department attended the 2018 Ryder Cup; if so, the reason they attended; the days on which they attended; the officials they met from a Ryder Cup organisation or the European Tour; and the costs for each individual's attendance. [41536/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I wish to inform the Deputy that neither I or any of the officials from my Department attended the 2018 Ryder Cup.

Decentralisation Programme Data

66. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of civil and public service jobs that relocated to all 53 locations in 25 counties under the 2003 decentralisation programme by Department and location in each county in tabular form; and his plans for a new programme. [40668/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, the Decentralisation Programme announced in December 2003 involved the potential relocation of over 10,000 civil and public service jobs to 53 locations in 25 counties.

It was decided by the Government in 2011 that the Decentralisation Programme should be cancelled in light of the budgetary and staffing outlook at that time. Up to that date, about a third of the target numbers, over 3,400 posts were decentralised. It is estimated that the proportion of civil servants working outside Dublin is now in the region of 50%.

The accompanying table sets out the details requested by the Deputy in his question.

I currently have no plans to introduce a further programme of decentralisation.

Number of Staff relocated (2011) - Decentralisation - Organisations and Staff Moved.

Location	-	-	Department/Organisation	Staff moved
Carlow	1	Carlow (advance party)	Enterprise Trade & Innovation	103
Cavan	2	Cavan (advance party)	Communications Energy & Natural Resources	57
	3	Kilrush	Office of the Revenue Commissioners	57
Clare	4	Shannon[1] (advance party)	Enterprise Ireland	66
			Agriculture Fisheries & Food	85
			BIM	20
	5	Clonakilty	Sea Fisheries Protection Authority	47
Cork	6	Cork City	Health Information and Quality Authority	47
	7	Buncrana	Social Protection	100

Location	-	-	Department/Organisation	Staff moved
Donegal	8	Gaoth Dobhair	Foras na Gaeilge	5
	9	Clifden (advance party)	Pobal	25
			Road Safety Authority	40
	10	Loughrea	Transport - Road Haulage	10
			Community Equality	
Galway	11	Na Forbacha	and Gaeltacht Affairs	12
	12	Killarney	Tourism Culture & Sport	79
Kerry	13	Listowel	Office of the Revenue Commissioners	52
	14	Athy (advance party)	Office of the Revenue Commissioners	73
	15	Naas	Irish Auditing & Accounting Supervisory Authority	12
			Defence	165
Kildare	16	Newbridge	Defence Forces HQ	55
Kilkenny	17	Thomastown (advance party in Kilkenny)	Health & Safety Authority	33
			Data Protection Commissioner	23
			Equality Tribunal	8
	18	Portarlington (advance party)	NCCA	12
Laois	19	Portlaoise (advance party)	Agriculture Fisheries & Food	317
Leitrim	20	Carrick-on-Shannon	Social Protection	159
	21	Limerick	Foreign Affairs - Development Co-operation Ireland	134
Limerick	22	Newcastlewest	Office of the Revenue Commissioners	52
Longford	23	Longford	Irish Prison Service	133
Louth	24	Dundalk² (advance party)	Sustainable Energy Ireland	11
	25	Ballina	Road Safety Authority	62
	26	Charlestown (advance party in Tubbercurry)	Community Equality & Gaeltacht Affairs	100
Mayo	27	Claremorris (advance party)	Office of Public Works	31
			Coroners Service	4
			Garda Civilian Human Resources Division	38
			National Property Services Regulatory Authority	9
			Office of the Director of Probation Service	15
	28	Navan	Office of the Revenue Commissioners	100
Meath	29	Trim	Office of Public Works	240
	30	Birr (advance party)	FÁS	20
Offaly	31	Tullamore	Finance	122
Roscommon	32	Roscommon	Property Registration Authority - Land Registry	77
Sligo	33	Sligo	Social Protection	72
			Private Security Authority	32
	34	Tipperary Town	Irish Naturalisation & Immigration Service (advance move)	63
			Garda HQ - Garda Central Vetting Office	67
	35	Thurles (advance party)	Garda HQ - Fixed Charge Processing Section	66
Tipperary	36	Roscrea (advance party)	Equality Authority	16

Location	-	-	Department/Organisation	Staff moved
	37	Athlone	Education & Skills	88
Westmeath	38	Mullingar (advance party)	Education & Skills	7
Wexford	39	Wexford (advance party)	Environment Heritage & Local Government	189
			Total	3,410

[1] Includes 40 Shannon Development posts absorbed into Enterprise Ireland and additional posts located in Shannon under a parallel process.

[2] SEI are in the process of relocating a further 13 posts to Dundalk.

Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General

67. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the estimated amount it would cost in 2019 if the budget for the Comptroller and Auditor General increased by 15%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40868/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The 2018 revised estimate gross figure for the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General was €13.977m. Therefore, the estimated amount it would cost in 2019 if the budget for the Comptroller and Auditor General increased by 15% would be €2.097m.

Garda Station Refurbishment

68. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the capital works the OPW has carried out in Howth Garda station in each of the years 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018; if the OPW has further capital works planned to be carried out at the station over the next 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40879/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I can confirm that the Office of Public Works spent €105,190.73 on capital works carried out at Howth Garda Station in 2016 and 2017. The following table provides details of this expenditure.

There has been no capital expenditure in 2018 and there are currently no plans for further capital works at Howth Garda Station in the next 12 months .

Year	Description	Cost
2016	Public office refurbishment	€79,450.00
2017	Public office refurbishment (work continued) Lighting upgrade	€21,613.87 €4,126.86
2018	No works to date	

National Botanic Gardens

69. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the grounds of St. Enda's Park, Rathfarnham, Dublin 16 is in the care of the National Botanic Gardens; if changes have been made to the management of the care of the grounds; and if changes are planned. [40888/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): St. Enda's

Park, Rathfarnham, Dublin 16 is managed as part of its National Historic Properties portfolio by the Office of Public Works. This portfolio of properties is preserved and presented by an expert team of heritage professionals including horticulture and botanical specialists. No changes have been made in regard to the standards or policies for the management and care for the grounds and no changes are planned for.

Garda Stations

70. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the plans by the OPW to purchase property for Garda stations; the stages in negotiation for each one; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40894/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Other than the finalisation of a small number of acquisitions currently being completed, the Office of Public Works has no plans to purchase property for Garda Stations.

State Properties

71. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 93 of 3 July 2018, if there has been progress made on this issue to date; if the information requested has been received by his Department from Sligo County Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40896/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I refer the Deputy to my response to his previous question on 3rd July 2018. In the response, I stated that the CSSO had outlined to Sligo County Council the material that they needed to provide in support of an application for the waiver of the Minister's interest in the piece of land identified, in accordance with Section 31 of the State Property Act 1954.

I am informed that Sligo County Council have not yet provided the material required. I would, however, point out that these can be complex matters and often take a lengthy time to resolve.

Flood Risk Assessments

72. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 192 of 11 July 2018, if there has been further progress in the evaluation of the flooding in the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40916/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Hazelhatch area of Celbridge, County Kildare was assessed as part of the Eastern CFRAM Study. The Plans identified the need for a further study of the area before being able to identify any feasible option to manage the existing flood risk.

A study, carried out by consultants on behalf of the local authority, highlighted the need for a re-assessment of the local hydrology for the area. The study also revealed the need to investigate the operation of the local drainage network.

The Office of Public Works (OPW) and Kildare County Council have completed the development of the required project brief. Commissioning this further study rests with the local

authority to progress.

Public Sector Pensions

73. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding pension reform; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41008/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The question relates to pension appeals lodged under the internal dispute resolution process of the Civil Service Pension Schemes.

First, I should advise the Deputy that appeals relating to the application of pension scheme rules are, of their nature, complex and not capable of easy resolution. In order for them to arrive at the appeal stage, decisions will already have been made on how those cases should be dealt with, but for one reason or another the individual is dissatisfied with the outcome and wishes to invoke their right to call for independent appeal.

In the appeal process on any individual case, my officials often have to engage with the employing Department or body, and sometimes with the applicant themselves or their legal advisor or union, to ensure that all the relevant facts have been obtained, before a formal submission can be prepared. In addition, complex pension scheme rules have to be carefully considered to ascertain whether they have been interpreted correctly or, in cases of ambiguity in the rules, to establish how a fair and just outcome can be obtained. On occasion, it is necessary to examine policy files relating to the pension term or condition at issue and to check for any precedent cases that might have relevance to the appeal case under review. In some cases, specific legal advice may be needed. Of its nature, this process is particularly time-consuming.

In relation to the year 2017, I can inform the Deputy that six appeals were lodged to my Department in that year under the Civil Service Pension Schemes Internal Dispute Mechanism.

Of the six appeals, the decision was issued to the appellant in four cases during 2017 (average time to process the appeal, eight months) while two cases remain outstanding.

Apart from appeals lodged during 2017, my Department also processed and issued decisions in respect of a number of other appeal cases which had been lodged prior to 2017.

I can assure the Deputy that my officials and I take very seriously our role in the processing and managing of appeal cases under the internal disputes resolution mechanism and, notwithstanding the constraints inherent in the process I have described, endeavour to ensure that decisions in appeal cases are issued in as timely a fashion as possible.

Public Sector Pay

74. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if public sector employees that are to be allowed to work beyond 65 years of age in certain circumstances will continue to be paid at the point on the increment scale they were at when they reached 65 years of age; the position in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41025/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, the Public Service Superannuation (Age of Retirement) Bill 2018, which was

published on 9 July, provides for an increase in the compulsory retirement age to 70, for public servants recruited prior to 1 April 2004. These public servants currently have a compulsory retirement age of 65. The Bill passed all stages in the Seanad on 17 July and is being treated as a priority with the intention to secure enactment of the legislation as early as possible in the current term.

Once the Bill is enacted and commenced, the majority of public servants recruited prior to 1 April 2004 will have a new compulsory retirement age of 70. For the most part, these public servants currently have a compulsory retirement age of 65

Until the commencement of the Bill, the current compulsory retirement age will continue to apply and public servants reaching the age of 65 will be required to retire. The interim arrangements will, however, continue to apply until the Bill is commenced. The interim arrangements, which have to respect the current statutory position of the compulsory retirement age of 65, allow pre 2004 public servants to retire and be rehired for one year, until they reach the age of 66. Payment under the interim arrangements is generally at the minimum point of the relevant pay scale in line with current retire and rehire arrangements.

The practice of payment at the minimum point will not apply to public servants who choose to remain beyond the age of 65 once the legislation is commenced. Public servants who reach the age of 65 after the commencement of the Bill will be able to remain at work past the age of 65 on current terms and conditions, including pay, up to the age of 70.

Office of Public Works

75. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if assistance can be provided by the OPW to a person (details supplied) adjacent to a national monument. [41098/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Lisnaran Fort in Annasgassan, Co. Louth is a National Monument in the guardianship of the State, not the ownership of the State, and is in the care of the Office of Public Works. The Office of Public Works has no role or responsibility to carry out works on third party property.

Ministerial Communications

76. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if there is a policy on ministerial use of private email for Government business in his Department; and if so, if it will be published. [41528/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My Department has an ICT Acceptable Usage Policy in place to ensure all users of the ICT facilities and services are fully aware of their obligations in terms of access to and use of these facilities and services. This policy states that my Department's e-mail system and authorised internet services are the only methods approved for the issue or publication of official Department information in electronic format. This Acceptable Usage Policy is part of the framework of the policies and procedures which the management of my Department has adopted to implement an information security management system. It is important to note that this policy also sits within an overarching framework that includes the Civil Service Code of Standards and Behaviour, Civil Service Disciplinary Code, Ethics in Public Office, the Official Secrets Act and other such relevant codes of conduct and behavior.

The Deputy may wish to know that my Department has plans to issue a circular to Heads of Departments/Offices on the use of private email and other messaging services in the Civil and Public Service which will be published on www.circulars.gov.ie in due course.

Official Engagements

77. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he and-or officials in his Department attended the 2018 Ryder Cup; if so, the reason they attended; the days on which they attended; the officials they met from the Ryder Cup organisation or the European Tour; and the cost for each individual's attendance. [41540/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Neither I nor any officials from my Department attended the 2018 Ryder Cup in an official capacity.

Literacy Levels

78. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the fact that over 500,000 people do not have above level four reading ability; his further views on the fact that half of these persons are in employment; if he has met Solas to discuss the matter; if he has considered increasing the resources to the National Adult Literacy Agency, NALA, in order to assist adults with their literacy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40694/18]

94. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the involvement of his Department in tackling adult literacy; if a financial allocation is provided for same; if so, the way in which it is utilised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40680/18]

95. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the level of adult literacy above level four; his further views on whether 2030 targets will be met; the improvements required in order to meet these targets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40691/18]

96. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of adults that sign up to National Adult Literacy Agency, NALA, reading courses; the average number of hours of tuition they receive; the length of time it takes to be able to read proficiently; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40692/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan) (Deputy John Halligan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 78 and 94 to 96, inclusive, together.

The delivery and enhancement of adult literacy and numeracy provision is being driven through the implementation of the Further Education and Training (FET) Literacy and Numeracy Strategy which is contained in the FET Strategy 2014-19. My Department, along with SOLAS, the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and partner agencies, are collaborating on the ongoing development and enhancement of the structures required to progress its implementation. The strategy sets out 12 inter- related elements which aim to promote, develop and encourage literacy and numeracy skills in the adult population. Progress to date includes the development and launch of the national awareness campaign, *Take the First Step*, development of national guidelines for the initial and on-going screening and assessment of participants and the publication of a number of research projects including the examination of integrating literacy and numeracy in FET programmes and an examination of barriers to participation in FET programmes. This year SOLAS has commissioned NALA to progress the evidence base

to inform best practice in relation to family learning. It is envisaged that *Family Learning Best Practice Guidelines* will be available in early 2019.

The SOLAS allocation to Education and Training Boards (ETBs) for 2018 for adult literacy and basic skills provision is over €35m. Funding for further education and training (FET) is allocated to SOLAS, who then allocate to the 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.

The ETB Adult Literacy Service provides programmes with accreditation at levels NQF levels 1-4. Provision for adult literacy is delivered through a number of programmes;

- Adult Literacy groups (small groups)

- Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education (ITABE)

- English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

- Skills for Work - workplace literacy courses

- Voluntary Literacy provision (one-to-one tuition)

- Family Learning Programmes

- Distance learning service

Details of the allocation of funding across programmes and the numbers of beneficiaries of those programmes is set out in the following table.

The adult literacy programme is informed by a set of operational guidelines that include guidance on initial assessment and engagement and the importance of more intensive provision to support literacy acquisition. Less intensive provision can be useful in welcoming and engaging new learners back into education but the guidelines recognise that more intensive approaches are required to enable progression.

I also recently launched a new policy framework for employee development, 'Supporting Working Lives and Enterprise Growth in Ireland', which was developed by SOLAS in consultation with key partners. This new approach will enable targeted support for vulnerable groups in the Irish workforce as it has a particular focus on employees those who have lower skills levels and who need more opportunities to advance in their working lives and careers, to sustain their employment and to avoid displacement or to avail of emerging job opportunities. The policy sets a target of having over 40,000 workers, whose skills level is below Level 5 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), engaged in state supported skills development by 2021. It should be noted that while the NFQ is not a literacy scale but a qualifications framework, I am committed to addressing literacy issues amongst those whose highest level of qualification is below Level 5, including through achieving certification for their learning. This will supplement the numbers already being supported through our adult literacy programmes. Participation by employees in relevant courses will be provided free of charge.

The substantial investment already being made in adult literacy, supplemented by this new initiative to support those in employment, will also ensure that Ireland is well positioned to achieve the 2030 literacy targets in the in the Agenda for Sustainable Development.

This new initiative is also a significant part of our national efforts to implement the European Commission's Upskilling Pathways Recommendation: New Opportunities for Adults, as almost half of those with less than an upper secondary qualification are in employment. My

Department has been working with partners on the implementation of the recommendation – which aims to help adults with less than upper second level education acquire a minimum level of literacy, numeracy and digital skills. My Department has established a multi–agency steering group to identify the priority cohorts and appropriate measures to implement the recommendation. This informed my Department's recent response to a request from the Commission for information regarding arrangements in Ireland on upskilling pathways interventions. The response presented the overall context for Upskilling Pathways in Ireland, including key background information that the Commission would find useful, as well as information on existing and planned provision. The Commission are conducting an audit of interventions across Member States and hope to report back on their findings by the end of the year.

Adult Literacy Programmes in ETBs

Programme	Funding Allocation for 2018	Projected Beneficiaries 2018
Adult Literacy (incl. Family Literacy)	€26,312,079	37,876
ESOL	€2,341,231	14,749
ITABE	€1,569,483	2,778
Libraries Training	€11,500	N/A[1]
Refugee Resettlement (ESOL)	€2,991,243	1,341
Skills for Work	€2,532,281	4,064
Totals	€35,757,817	60,8088

1. Information not available at this time.

Skills Development

79. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the action plan developed for addressing unemployment if caused by adult illiteracy (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41234/18]

143. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the numbers achieved from 2011 to 2017 under the national skills strategy by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41231/18]

144. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the age targets (details supplied) achieved from 2011 to 2017 under the national skills strategy in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41232/18]

145. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a target (details supplied) was not achieved within the 2011 to 2017 timeframe; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41233/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan) (Deputy John Halligan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 79 and 143 to 145, inclusive, together.

The National Skills Strategy 2025 includes information on the achievement of targets set out in the previous strategy, *Towards Tomorrow's Skills*, which was published in 2007. Some of these targets used the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) as a reference point. Since 2007, the number of learners completing senior cycle at second level increased from 81% to 90.6%. This exceeds the 90% target set for 2020. 93% of people aged 20-24 achieved an award at Levels 4-5 or more on the NFQ in 2014. This was an increase of 7% on the baseline year of

2005, and just 1% short of the target for 2020.

However, progress was not as strong in relation to the target to increase the percentages of people in the labour force holding a qualification at Levels 4-5. A clear challenge also remains in relation to the share of persons with NFQ Level 3 as the highest level of education attained.

In the National Skills Strategy 2025, targets are set to reduce the percentage of adults scoring at level 1 in the PIAAC survey from a baseline of 17.5% to 12% by 2025, and to increase the percentage of adults scoring at levels 2, 3 and 4 in the PIAAC survey from a baseline of 44% to 50% by 2025.

The delivery and enhancement of adult literacy and numeracy provision is being driven through the implementation of the Further Education and Training (FET) Literacy and Numeracy Strategy which is contained in the FET Strategy 2014-19. My Department, along with SOLAS, the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and partner agencies are collaborating on the ongoing development and enhancement of the structures required to progress its implementation. The strategy sets out 12 inter- related elements which aim to promote, develop and encourage literacy and numeracy skills in the adult population. Progress to date includes the development and launch of the national awareness campaign, *Take the First Step*, development of national guidelines for the initial and on-going screening and assessment of participants and the publication of a number of research projects including the examination of integrating literacy and numeracy in FET programmes and an examination of barriers to participation in FET programmes. This year SOLAS has commissioned NALA to progress the evidence base to inform best practice in relation to family learning. It is envisaged that *Family Learning Best Practice Guidelines* will be available in early 2019.

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proaches are required to enable progression.

I also recently launched a new policy framework for employee development, 'Supporting Working Lives and Enterprise Growth in Ireland', which was developed by SOLAS in consultation with key partners. This new approach will enable targeted support for vulnerable groups in the Irish workforce as it has a particular focus on employees those who have lower skills levels and who need more opportunities to advance in their working lives and careers, to sustain their employment and to avoid displacement or to avail of emerging job opportunities. The policy sets a target of having over 40,000 workers, whose skills level is below Level 5 on the NFQ, engaged in state supported skills development by 2021. It should be noted that while the NFQ is not a literacy scale but a qualifications framework, I am committed to addressing literacy issues amongst those whose highest level of qualification is below Level 5, including through achieving certification for their learning. This will supplement the numbers already being supported through our adult literacy programmes. Participation by employees in relevant courses will be provided free of charge.

The substantial investment already being made in adult literacy, supplemented by this new initiative to support those in employment, will also ensure that Ireland is well positioned to achieve the 2025 literacy targets set out in the National Skills Strategy 2025.

This new initiative is also a significant part of our national efforts to implement the European Commission's Upskilling Pathways Recommendation: New Opportunities for Adults, as almost half of those with less than an upper secondary qualification are in employment. My Department has been working with partners on the implementation of the recommendation – which aims to help adults with less than upper second level education acquire a minimum level of literacy, numeracy and digital skills. My Department has established a multi–agency steering group to identify the priority cohorts and appropriate measures to implement the recommendation. This informed my Department's recent response to a request from the Commission for information regarding arrangements in Ireland on upskilling pathways interventions. The response presented the overall context for Upskilling Pathways in Ireland, including key background information that the Commission would find useful, as well as information on existing and planned provision. The Commission are conducting an audit of interventions across Member States and hope to report back on their findings by the end of the year.

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Skills for Work	€2,532,281	4,064
Totals	€35,757,817	60,808

Fulltime provision that includes significant literacy and numeracy components include:

Programme	Funding Allocation for 2018	Projected Beneficiaries 2018
Justice Workshops	€747,217	174
Local Training Initiatives	€23,003,876	3,570
Specialist Training Programmes	€45,736,130	3,469

Programme	Funding Allocation for 2018	Projected Beneficiaries 2018
Specific Skills Training	€42,615,421	11,231
Youthreach	€66,335,038	7,169
Totals	€178,437,682	25,613

1. Information not available at this time

Skills Development

80. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans for a paid learning leave programme for employees with literacy, numeracy and digital needs or who have less than a level four qualification, to develop basic literacy and numeracy skills; his further plans for funding same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41238/18]

81. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has considered options to support a paid learning leave programme for employees who have literacy, numeracy and digital needs or who have less than a level 4 qualification, to develop basic literacy and numeracy skills; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41239/18]

147. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to follow the European Commission in its promise to have a concrete plan on upskilling pathways for adults with low skills levels or no upper secondary education by 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41236/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan) (Deputy John Halligan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 80, 81 and 147 together.

My Department has been working on the development of a plan for the implementation of the European Commission's Upskilling Pathways Recommendation: New Opportunities for Adults. My Department has been working with partners on the implementation of the Upskilling Pathways recommendation, which aims to help adults with less than upper second level education acquire a minimum level of literacy, numeracy and digital skills.

My Department has established a multi–agency steering group to identify the priority cohorts and appropriate measures to implement the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation. This informed my Department's recent response to a request from the Commission for information regarding arrangements in Ireland on upskilling pathways interventions. The response presented the overall context for Upskilling Pathways in Ireland, including key background information that the Commission would find useful, as well as information on existing and planned provision. The Commission are conducting an audit of interventions across Member States and hope to report back on their findings by the end of the year.

I also recently launched a new policy framework for employee development, 'Supporting Working Lives and Enterprise Growth in Ireland'. This new approach will enable targeted support for vulnerable groups in the Irish workforce as it has a particular focus on employees who have lower skills levels and who need more opportunities to advance in their working lives and careers, to sustain their employment and to avoid displacement or to avail of emerging job opportunities. This is a substantial part of our national efforts to implement the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation as almost half of those with less than an upper secondary qualification are in employment.

The policy 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. Participation by employees in relevant courses will be provided free of charge. The issue of paid leave to take part in upskilling would be a matter for each individual employer.

The development and publication of this policy framework is a key deliverable under the 2018 Action Plan for Education.

School Management

82. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to concerns expressed by the parent body in relation to the board of management of a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40599/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Department's inspectorate conducted a Whole School Evaluation (WSE) Inspection in Castleknock Educate Together and the report was published on my Department's website on 04 September 2018. The report made a number of recommendations for improvement to the school management.

Responsibility for the implementation of improvements identified in the WSE lies in the first instance with the Board of Management of the school. In carrying out this duty the Board is obliged to consult with and keep the Patron, Educate Together informed of decisions and proposals as they work towards implementing the recommendations of the WSE.

School Transport

83. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a school transport service will be provided for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40600/18]

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

The purpose of my Department's School Transport Scheme is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children who reside remote from their nearest school.

In the 2017/18 school year over 117,000 children, including over 12,000 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 4,500 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually at a total cost of almost €190 million in 2017.

My Department is seeking additional information in relation to this case and Bus Éireann will liaise directly with the family when this information is received.

Departmental Correspondence

84. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a response will issue to an interim reply (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40604/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Meeting requests and/or invitations to attend events in schools are managed in conjunction with visits by the Minister to the relevant areas. The request from the school referred to in this question will be considered in that context.

Education Centre Network

85. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address a matter regarding funding for issues at a centre (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40616/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Education Centres are independent statutory bodies under Section 37 of the Education Act (1998) and are managed by voluntary Management Committees elected annually and comprised mainly of teachers.

My Department is the main source of funding for Education Centres through direct budget allocations towards administrative staff pay and operating costs. All funds held by Centres are subject to compliance with the general rules governing bodies in the public sector.

The Centre is question has been allocated €233,244 in 2018 for core funding, local course funding, minor works and ICT grant.

In addition, the Centre receives funding from the support services which are funded by my Department for the purpose of designing and delivering continuing professional development courses and other professional support for teachers throughout the country (e.g. support service pay for room hire, photocopying, preparation and checking of travel and subsistence forms). Education Centres also raise funds through local activities and from other organisations.

I wish to inform the Deputy that officials of my Department have been engaging with the Education Centre in question regarding its funding and how it can be utilised.

Special Educational Needs

86. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if and when a school place will be found to meet the needs of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40628/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): It is the policy of the Department that all children with Special Educational Needs can have access to an education appropriate to their needs, preferably in recognised school settings through the primary and post primary school network.

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

Decisions about placement should be based on individual needs and take into account a number of factors including parental wishes, availability of evidence-based treatments and well-trained staff and individual factors such as targets for intervention and management of behaviours.

Some students, although academically able to access the curriculum in mainstream, may

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

Others may have such complex needs that they are best placed in a special school.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), is responsible for planning and co-ordinating the provision of education and support services to children with special educational needs in conjunction with schools and the Health Service Executive (HSE).

The local SENOs are available to advise parents in relation to supports which may be available to support children with special educational needs. The local SENO contact details are available on *www.ncse.ie.*

Where students with Special Educational Needs experience difficulties, the first course of action is engagement with first level services provided by the Department of Education and Skills (National Educational Psychological Service, Special Education Support Service, National Behavioural Support Service, National Council for Special Education) and Health Services Executive (HSE)/ HSE funded services.

If a parent of a student feels that a student is currently experiencing continuing difficulties they should request through their school a multi-disciplinary school based review involving NEPS, the local SENO and other relevant professionals.

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

School Funding

87. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the grant schemes available from his Department or other Government bodies to a primary school in order to build a school hall; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40644/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department provides a number of mechanisms through which improvements are carried out in schools. Through the 6 year Capital Programme, the investment plan is about looking to the future and ensuring that our school infrastructure is well prepared to accommodate our growing school population. The programme also addresses the requirements of many schools which are in need of upgrading and refurbishment, although they may not be experiencing significant demographic pressure.

The recent launch of Project Ireland 2040 included an announcement of a major package of investment in education for the next decade with the school building budget increasing by 70%. This major investment will underpin the implementation of the Action Plan for Education which is the government's plan to make the Irish education and training service the best in Europe by 2026. This funding allows for a continued focus on the provision of new permanent school places to keep pace with demographic demand and also provides for an additional focus on the refurbishment of existing school buildings to include the building and modernisation of PE facilities in primary and post-primary schools.

In addition, in terms of other Government bodies, it is open to any school to explore any

funding options that may be available under the Sports Capital Programme administered by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport.

School Transport

88. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if, following the closure of a school (details supplied), an undertaking was given to the parents of children who were in the catchment area that school transport would be provided for their children to attend another school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40645/18]

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

The purpose of my Department's School Transport Scheme is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children who reside remote from their nearest school.

In the 2017/18 school year over 117,000 children, including over 12,000 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 4,500 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually at a total cost of almost €190 million in 2017.

School transport arrangements under the Central/Closed School Rule originated from the last major amalgamation of schools in the late 1960's. Given the time lapse it is not feasible to provide copies of agreements, where they exist, reached between the Department and the School Authorities at the time of amalgamation.In any event, changes to my Department's Primary School Transport Scheme which were finalised for the beginning of the 2012 school year mean that children are now eligible for school transport where they reside not less than 3.2 kilometres from and are attending their nearest national school as determined by the Department/ Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language. The terms of the Primary School Transport Scheme are applied equitably on a national basis.

State Examinations

89. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if second level students are permitted to sit a subject as a junior certificate examination where they are studying that subject outside of school time and as a subject that exceeds the school's curriculum, such as a second foreign language, if they have the support and agreement of the school in doing the additional subject; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40646/18]

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

The Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA) is a school based award issued by recog-

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

Where students take extra subjects outside of their recognised school setting these subjects cannot satisfy the requirements for ongoing, formative assessment by recognised schools and cannot, therefore, be included as part of the JCPA.

School Transport

90. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding school transport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40648/18]

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

The purpose of my Department's School Transport Scheme is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children who reside remote from their nearest school.

In the 2017/18 school year over 117,000 children, including over 12,000 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 4,500 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually at a total cost of almost €190 million in 2017.

School transport arrangements under the Central/Closed School Rule originated from the last major amalgamation of schools in the late 1960's. Given the time lapse it is not feasible to provide copies of agreements, where they exist, reached between the Department and the School Authorities at the time of amalgamation.In any event, changes to my Department's Primary School Transport Scheme which were finalised for the beginning of the 2012 school year mean that children are now eligible for school transport where they reside not less than 3.2 kilometres from and are attending their nearest national school as determined by the Department/ Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language. The terms of the Primary School Transport Scheme are applied equitably on a national basis.

School Transport Provision

91. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of school transport for the special needs students in a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40649/18]

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 service referred to by the Deputy is a new service and is out to tender for the 2018/19 school year and Bus Éireann will continue to liaise directly with the families.

Families of children who are eligible for school transport may avail of the Special Transport Grant towards the cost of private transport arrangements until services are finalised.

Schools Building Projects Status

92. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress being made on securing a new school building for a school (details supplied). [40671/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy may be aware, a building project for the school in question is included in my Department's capital programme.

Officials in my Department have identified a preferred site for the school and negotiations are ongoing at present.

Due to commercial sensitivities relating to site acquisitions generally I am not in a position to provide further details at this time. I can assure the Deputy that the school patron will be kept informed of progress.

Schools Facilities

93. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress being made on upgrading facilities at a school (details supplied) while the school awaits a new building. [40672/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has no record of receiving an application for funding from the school in question for upgrading works to the school's existing facilities.

As the Deputy is aware, a building project for the school is included in my Department's capital programme.

Officials in my Department have identified a preferred site for the school and negotiations are ongoing at present.

Due to commercial sensitivities relating to site acquisitions generally I am not in a position to provide further details at this time. I can assure the Deputy that the school patron will be kept informed of progress. My Department is committed to providing improved permanent accommodation for the school.

Questions Nos. 94 to 96, inclusive, answered with Question No. 78.

School Patronage

97. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if patronage for a new second-level school in an area (details supplied) has been awarded; if not, when it will be awarded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40695/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, I recently announced the opening of 42 new schools over the next 4 years. This announcement followed nationwide demographic exercises carried out by my Department into the current and future need for primary and post-primary school places across the country, and included provision for a new 1,000 pupil post primary school to serve Citywest/Saggart (Tallaght & Newcastle_Rathcoole school planning areas) as a Regional Solution to open in September 2020. This announcement follows nationwide, demographic exercises carried out by my Department into the future need for primary and post-primary schools across the country.

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

The new Online Patronage Process System (OPPS) has been developed to provide objective information to all parents and guardians which will allow them to make an informed choice in expressing a preference for their preferred model of patronage for their child's education.

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

The patronage process commenced in June 2018 for the four new post-primary schools to be established in 2019 to serve the following school planning areas:

- Donaghmede - Howth - D13 (Belmayne/Clongriffin area)

- Galway City and Oranmore (Regional Solution)

- Laytown and Drogheda (Regional Solution)

- Wicklow

The patronage process for the remaining schools, including the new post-primary school referred to by the Deputy, will also be run at a later date, significantly ahead of their due opening. Updates in relation to further patronage processes will be announced on the OPPS website (*http://patronage.education.gov.ie/*) and my Department's website *(www.education.ie)*.

Schools Building Projects Status

98. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the building projects for schools (details supplied). [40701/18]

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

In June 2018, the schools and their design team were authorised to commence the prequalification process to select a shortlist of contractors for tender stage. Pre-qualification normally takes between 8 and 12 weeks to complete.

Once the prequalification process is complete, the Department will be in contact with the Board of Management with a view to progressing the project to tender stage.

Schools Building Projects Status

99. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a building programme for a school (details supplied) will commence; and when a timeline for its completion will issue. [40702/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that a major capital project for the provision of permanent accommodation for the school in question is being addressed through my Department's Capital Programme.

It is envisaged that permanent accommodation for the school will be provided through a campus arrangement with a local Institute of Further Education on its current site. This project will also include the redevelopment and provision of enhanced accommodation for the Institute. In the context of initiating architectural planning for the project, my Department is liaising with Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board and will be in further contact with the school's Parton in this regard.

School Transport Provision

100. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the services that can accommodate a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40706/18]

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

The purpose of my Department's School Transport Scheme is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children who reside remote from their nearest school.

In the 2017/18 school year over 117,000 children, including over 12,000 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 4,500 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually at a total cost of almost €190 million in 2017.

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

Eligibility is determined following consultation with the National Council for Special Education through its network of Special Education Needs Organisers.

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

they reach their 18th year and these children may apply for school transport in accordance with the terms of the above scheme.

The Department of Health/Health Service Executive assumes direct responsibility for young adults with special educational needs who are over 18 years.

The terms of the School Transport Schemes are applied equitably on a national basis.

School Accommodation Provision

101. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if documents submitted to his Department as part of an additional accommodation stage 2b report will be returned to a school (details supplied) as a matter of urgency in order to be included in a tender document. [40740/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school to which the Deputy refers recently submitted its stage 2b report to my Department together with an application for additional funding.

A decision on this will issue as soon the documentation has been fully assessed.

The report submitted is for the Department's file. The school's Design Team will be aware of this and have its own copy of the report.

Schools Site Acquisitions

102. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the site chosen for the new primary school due to open in Newtownmountkennedy, County Wicklow in 2019. [40791/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, I recently announced the opening of 42 new schools over the next 4 years. This announcement followed nationwide demographic exercises carried out by my Department into the current and future need for primary and post-primary school places across the country, and included provision for a new primary school to serve Kilcoole/Newtownmountkennedy to open in September 2019.

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

In line with the policy on the use of state assets (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform Circulars 11/15 and 17/16), my Department will be seeking to maximize the use of sites already in my ownership and of available properties in the ownership of other State bodies, where these are considered suitable.

In addition as part of my Department's ongoing engagement with Local Authorities in respect of statutory planning processes and under the MoU on school site acquisitions, my Department will be examining all potential suitable site options, including appropriately zoned sites, to serve the relevant areas.

Taking into account all of the above, decisions will then be made as part of the site acquisition process in relation to appropriate sites for all the schools announced including the new

primary school announced to serve Kilcoole/Newtownmountkennedy, and will be confirmed at a later date.

Student Assistance Fund

103. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the financial supports available to assist a single parent who was in full-time employment, is over the income limit for SUSI and is now returning to full-time education in order to become a qualified mental health nurse; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40836/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Apart from the Student Grant Scheme, students in third-level institutions experiencing exceptional financial need can apply for support under the Student Assistance Fund. This Fund assists students, in a sensitive and compassionate manner, who might otherwise be unable to continue their third level studies due to their financial circumstances. Information on the fund is available through the Access Office in the third level institution attended. This fund is administered on a confidential, discretionary basis.

Tax relief at the standard rate of tax may be claimed in respect of tuition fees paid for approved courses at approved colleges of higher education. Further information on this tax relief is available from the Revenue Commissioners at *www.revenue.ie*

Some higher education institutions operate their own benevolent schemes. Prospective students should contact the Access Office in the college attended, for advice on the specific supports that might be available.

Student Grant Scheme Design

104. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way in which the SUSI grant is calculated (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40866/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The means test arrangements of the Student Grant Scheme are applied nationally. Student grant applications are means tested on gross income from all sources earned inside and outside the State within a specified reference period. In the case of both employed and self-employed applicants, gross income, before deduction of income tax or universal social charge, is assessed with certain specified social welfare and health service executive payments excluded. Therefore, all income is assessed from the same starting point, eliminating any distortion which might arise from different spending decisions in different households.

The Student Grant Scheme provides for higher income thresholds for larger families. In addition to this, further increases in the income thresholds are provided for where additional family members are attending further and higher education at the same time. The 2018 Scheme also allows students to disregard holiday earnings up to €4,500 from the assessment of reckonable income.

School Staff

105. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to end

the two-tier system under which some school secretaries are employed as public service staff with full entitlements by his Department while others are employed by school boards of management and have no entitlements; his views on whether this two-tier system is discriminatory; the reason for the system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40873/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): To answer the Deputy, 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, these schemes have been largely phased out and have been superseded by the more extensive capitation grant schemes.

Under these schemes, the majority of primary and voluntary secondary schools in the Free Education Scheme now receive assistance to provide for secretarial, caretaking and cleaning services. Within the schemes, it is a matter for each individual school to decide how best to apply the grant funding to suit its particular needs. Where a school uses the capitation grant funding to employ a secretary, such staff are employees of individual schools. My Department has no plans to develop an alternative scheme for schools to employ secretaries separate to the current system of capitation grant assistance.

My Department has recently made significant efforts to improve the pay of school secretaries who are employed using capitation grant assistance. In 2015 my Department engaged with the Unions representing school secretaries on negotiations and agreed to enter an independent arbitration process on the issue. The Arbitrator recommended a cumulative pay increase of 10% between 2016 and 2019 for school secretaries 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. Following the arbitration process, grant funding used by schools to fund the salaries of ancillary staff is being improved on a phased basis between 2016 and 2019 in order to enable schools to implement the arbitration outcome.

Schools Building Projects Status

106. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a building project for a school (detail supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40874/18]

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 six Year Construction Programme.

I wish to advise the Deputy that the project is progressing to the architectural planning stage and is expected to be delivered by an external agency to my Department. Arrangements are currently being made in this regard and my Department will be in further contact with the school authority when these arrangements have been finalised.

Special Educational Needs

107. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the change in special education investment since 2011; the impact this has had; the number of children with special educational needs participating in mainstream schools; the number progressing through the education system to third level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40875/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): This Government is com-

mitted to ensuring every child with special educational needs has the opportunity to fulfill their full potential.

Department of Education and Skills funding for special education provision in 2018 will amount to some €1.75 billion, up 43% since 2011 and equivalent to 18.7% of the gross overall current allocation for education and training. The funding includes:

- The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), which is a separate statutory agency, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), is responsible for processing applications from schools for special educational needs supports. The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in allocating such support. NCSE's Support Service has brought under its control the Special Education Support Service (SESS), the National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS) and the Visiting Teacher Service for children who are deaf/hard of hearing and for children who are blind/visually impaired (VTSVHI). The Support Service provides advice and support to schools on the education and inclusion of students with special educational needs, providing in-school support for support teachers, continuing professional development for teachers, and support to schools on the management of challenging behavior. It will also enhance the multi-disciplinary capacity of the education system through providing access to expert knowledge in areas such as autism, speech and language therapy and challenging behaviour.

- National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) delivers a consultative, tiered service delivery model to schools, in line with international best practice for the effective and efficient delivery of educational psychological services that best meet the needs of all pupils/students in schools. This service delivery model allows NEPS psychologists to support schools to provide an effective continuum of support to meet the needs of pupils/students.

- Over 13,400 Special Education Teaching posts under the Special Education Teaching allocation model, introduced in mainstream primary and post primary schools for the 2017/2018 school year, providing additional teaching support to pupils with special educational needs. The number of students receiving additional special education teaching support in mainstream education increased from 138,493 in 2011 to approximately 166,000 in 2017.

- 15,000 Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) available from September 2018, providing additional adult support staff to schools to cater for the additional care needs of pupils with disabilities in an educational context. An additional 800 SNA posts has been made available for September 2018 with up to a further 140 SNA posts available from September to December 2018. Approximately 36,000 students have access to SNA support in schools in 201718 school year, compared to 22,200 in 2011/12.

- Over 7,900 students in 124 special schools with 1,490 teachers, increased from 6,848 students with 1,141 teachers in 2011.

- Approximately 1,456 special classes in place with 155 new Special Classes opened in September 2018 in mainstream primary and post primary schools. This compares to 548 special classes in 2011.

- Assistive technology/specialized equipment. Under the Assistive Technology scheme, as set out in Circular 0010/2013, the Department of Education and Skills provides funding to schools towards the cost of computers and specialist equipment, which are required for educational purposes, for use by students with special educational needs. Equipment is provided under this scheme for children with more complex disabilities who, in order to access the school curriculum, require essential specialist equipment which they do not already have, or which cannot be provided for them through the school's existing provisions.

- Special School transport arrangements . The purpose of the scheme is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children with special educational needs arising from a diagnosed disability

- Enhanced capitation grants for special schools and special classes attached to mainstream primary and post primary schools , based on disability categories, are paid to special and mainstream schools with special classes to assist them with the extra costs associated with setting up small classes. Class running costs are usually established by dividing the costs overs the number of students and the number of students in a special class is much lower than in a mainstream class.

- Modification of school buildings .

- Special Arrangements for State Examinations facilitates access to the certificate examinations by candidates who would have difficulty in accessing the examination or communicating what they know to an examiner because of a physical, visual, hearing and/or learning difficulty. 17,661 students benefitted from this scheme in 2017, increased from 14,287 in 2011.

- Specialised Training for people with disabilities is funded by the National Training Fund The target group for STPs comprises unemployed people with disabilities, in receipt of a disability payment or in possession of a letter from their doctor, who are aged over 16, and are deemed by DEASP and ETB's to require the additional supports that STPs provide.

- Adult Education – once off projects for disability in education.

- The Fund for Students with Disabilities supports students to participate fully in their academic programmes and aims to ensure that students are not disadvantaged by reason of a disability. Eligible full-time students can receive assistance from PLC level to doctoral level, and the Fund is not means-tested. A claim under the Fund is made on behalf of an eligible student by their college following an assessment of need. The Fund typically provides three types of assistance, including assistive technology equipment and software, personal and academic support, and transport.

The HEA do not collect data on the progression of students with special educational needs to higher education but collect data on entrants with disabilities, and in addition, collate data on the number of students in higher education supported by the Fund for Students with Disabilities. The number of students with a disability entering higher education has doubled from 2011, rising from 2,166 to 4,417 in 2016/17.

The continued increase in investment by this Government to support students with special educational needs across the education system would indicate that it is having a positive impact on their retention and participation in school and their progression to third level and further education and training.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

108. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department has investigated difficulties experienced by mature students in availing of a student grant; his plans to relax the criteria applied to independent students (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40889/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Very significant numbers of third-level students move out of home to go to college and continue to be supported by their

parents while in full-time education. Confirmation that a student is living separately from his/her parents is of itself, not sufficient to establish independent status. When considering whether a student meets the conditions to be assessed independently of his or her parents, grant awarding authorities like SUSI are obliged to satisfy themselves beyond doubt that an acceptable degree of proof of independent living in the relevant period has been submitted by the grant applicant. For student grants purposes, a student may be assessed as an independent student if he/she has attained the age of 23 on the 1st of January of the year of first entry to an approved post leaving certificate course or an approved higher education course or of re-entry to an approved course following a break in studies of at least three years, and is not ordinarily resident with his/her parents from the previous 1 October. Otherwise he/she would continue to be assessed on the basis of his/her parents' income.

The onus is on the grant applicant to provide the necessary documentary evidence as requested by the relevant grant awarding authority. Such documentary evidence will vary from student to student, depending on each individual's particular set of circumstances.

The type of documentary evidence required by SUSI can be viewed at the following link: *https://susi.ie/eligibility/applicant-class/*

It is important to note that each year a significant number of student grant applicants are assessed as 'independent' students and awarded student supports on that basis.

If an individual applicant considers that he/she has been unjustly refused a student grant, he/she may appeal, in the first instance, to his/her awarding body. Where an individual applicant has had an appeal turned down in writing by the awarding authority and remains of the view that the scheme has not been interpreted correctly in his/her case, an appeal outlining the position may be submitted by the applicant to the independent Student Grants Appeals Board.

School Transport Provision

109. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the delays in the payment of the bus escort grant to school (details supplied) and the subsequent difficulties the current situation is causing for the students, the majority of whom have moderate to severe learning disabilities, and for the management and staff; the steps he has taken to address this matter; the number of schools nationwide which are awaiting delayed payment of the bus escort grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40892/18]

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

The purpose of my Department's School Transport Scheme is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children who reside remote from their nearest school.

In the 2017/18 school year more than 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.

Funding for school transport escorts is being processed and over 450 schools will have received advance payment for the 2018/19 school year by 10th October 2018.

Schools Data

110. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide a map of the 314 school planning areas. [40901/18]

111. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a map of the school planning areas was last revised. [40902/18]

112. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide the previous school planning maps for Dublin. [40903/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 110 to 112, inclusive, together.

The information requested by the Deputy around the individual maps of the 314 school planning areas is not readily available and would represent a significant administrative burden to compile. However, if the Deputy wishes to nominate a number of school planning areas, I would be happy to provide individual maps of these areas directly to the Deputy.

As the Deputy will be aware, in order to plan for school provision and analyse the relevant demographic data in a way that takes account of the significant local and regional variations in demographic trends and enrolment projections, my Department divides the country into 314 school planning areas, of which some 40 are in Dublin.

Using school planning area boundaries within my Department's Geographic Information System (GIS) allows data within those boundaries, including data for enrolments in schools, child benefit and other relevant data to be added to the mapping information, grouped and analysed. The GIS records the number of primary and post-primary schools within each planning area, the combined enrolments for all of the schools within each area, including total enrolment and enrolment in each class group, together with child benefit data for the 0-4 age group relevant to the area.

In most areas, school planning areas were based on traditional school catchment areas where all primary schools were assigned to a post-primary feeder area (typically a population centre or town), containing one or more post-primary schools. The school planning areas were developed for use with the GIS in 2008 and with the introduction of Small Areas in Census 2011, these areas were amended to align with Census Small Areas. The current school planning areas take account not only of local groupings of schools, but also of natural boundaries, Census Small Areas and other local conditions.

These school planning areas are used in the demographic exercise as a basis for the assessment of areas of growth and to inform recommendations on the establishment of any new schools required in that school planning area.

School Staff

113. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a selection process has commenced or if the appointment of a principal for the Gaelcholáiste for north County Kildare has occurred in view of the fact that the principal was due to be appointed by 1 September 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40907/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department allows for appointments of Principals to all new schools from 1 September of the school year prior to the

opening of a new school.

The recruitment and appointment of teachers (including Principals) to fill teaching posts is a matter for the individual school authority, subject to procedures agreed under Section 24(3) of the Education Act 1998 (as amended by the Education (Amendment) Act 2012).

Schools Refurbishment

114. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a design team has been appointed for the refurbishment and extension to a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40908/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that the project brief for the school in question has been finalised and the Schedule of Accomodation has been furnished to the Patron who I understand has provided the details directly to the school.

My Department will be in further contact with the school authority relating to the commencement of the architectural planning process which will include the appointment of a design team.

Schools Building Projects Status

115. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a design team has been appointed for the construction of a school (details supplies); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40909/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The project to which the Deputy refers has been devolved for delivery to the local Education and Training Board (ETB). My Department recently gave approval to the ETB to proceed with the appointment of a Design Team for the project. That process is currently underway and will take a number of months to complete.

Schools Building Projects Status

116. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when construction will commence on a new school (details supplied); when phase 1 of the construction project will be completed; when is it expected phase 2 of the construction project will be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40910/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school building project to which the Deputy refers is currently on site.

The initial phase is the construction of the new 8 classroom school. Unless there are any unforeseen events arising, this first phase is due for completion and handover in Quarter 2 2019.

The second phase is due for completion and handover in Quarter 1 2020.

Schools Building Projects Data

117. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has received the revised pre-qualification report from the design team in relation to a school (details supplied); if it has been reviewed; when tenders will be invited from the shortlist of contractors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40911/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The major building project referred to is now at an advanced stage of Architectural Planning - Stage 2(b) – Detailed Design.

As the Deputy will be aware, the project was authorised to commence the Pre-Qualification of Contractors in April 2018. The Design Team has submitted a revised pre-qualification report and this was reviewed and approved by my Department on 2nd October.

When the Design Team has finalised the pre-qualification process and the Department has conducted a final review of the NZEB (Near Zero Energy Building) submission, this project will then be progressed to tender stage. A tender stage normally takes between 7 and 8 months to complete.

The Department will keep the school informed with regard to the projected timeframe for the progression of this project to tender stage and construction and the steps involved.

Schools Designation

118. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a decision has been made on the application by a school (details supplied) to become co-educational; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40912/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department is in receipt of correspondence from the Patron of the school in question relating to a proposed change of the school's status.

The matter is being considered and my Department will be engaging further with the Patron as part of this process.

Schools Site Acquisitions

119. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the required clarifications have been received from the vendor of the site for schools (details supplied); if satisfactory, if a design team can be appointed for both projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40913/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Engagement with the vendor is still ongoing in respect of outstanding clarifications regarding the proposed school site acquisition. Therefore, the appointment of a design team cannot be progressed yet but Department officials are working to do so as soon as it is possible.

Schools Building Projects Status

120. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress to date with the construction of a school (details supplied) which commenced construction in May 2017; when construction will be completed; when the new school will be ready for occupation;

and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40915/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Phase 2 of the project referred to by the Deputy includes the demolition of the existing school and construction of the permanent 32 classroom school. This particular phase of the building project commenced earlier this year and is progressing.

The contract period for this project is 24 months.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

121. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address a matter in relation to correspondence from his Department concerning a person (details supplied); and the way in which the opinion of the HSE can be disregarded. [40922/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As this refers directly to an individual person I have referred this query to the National Council for Special Education, NCSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

The NCSE through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), is responsible for processing applications from schools for special educational needs supports, including applications for assistive technology.

SENOs make recommendations to my Department where assistive technology is required. The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in making recommendations for support, as set out in Circular 0010/2013 which is published on my Department's website.

https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0010_2013.pdf

In order to qualify for equipment under the assistive technology scheme, a child must have been diagnosed with a physical or communicative disability and must also have a recommendation in a professional assessment that the equipment is essential in order to allow the child to access the curriculum. It must also be clear that the existing I.T. equipment in the school is insufficient to meet the child's needs.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

122. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated cost of reversing the budget 2011 decision to increase the SUSI grant non-adjacency qualifying distance from 24 km to 45 km; if reversing same has been considered in advance of budget 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40923/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The cost of reversing the change to the distance criteria in the Student Grant, is estimated to be in the region of €26m.

The above costing assumes that a change to the distance criterion would result in a similar percentage of students qualifying for the higher non-adjacent grant support, as existed pre Budget 2011.

The Deputy will appreciate that there are a large number of competing demands for available funding. Decisions with regard to Budget 2019 will be announced on Budget day.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

123. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way in which the distances for adjacent and non-adjacent third-level grants were arrived at; his plans to reform the calculation of distances to one of a mean average for the journey; his further plans to address the issue of the calculation via the shortest distance using rural roads in poor repair; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40924/18]

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

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

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

The current qualifying distance of 45km for the higher non-adjacent rate of student grant takes into account a reasonable radius within which students may commute on a daily basis. Any decision to review the distance criteria would have to be considered in the context of the overall priorities and financial resources available for higher and further education.

Schools Building Projects Status

124. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the major building project for a school (details supplied); if consideration has been given to an earlier profile for commencement of construction than Q3 2019 in view of the urgent need for the school building; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40945/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The major building project for St. Paul's Secondary School, Monasterevin is currently at an advanced stage of architectural planning, Stage 2(b) – Detailed Design.

The Design Team is currently in the process of completing the Pre-Qualification of Contractors process for the main contract and reserved specialist contracts. When pre-qualification is complete the project will then be progressed to tender stage.

The project is currently profiled to commence construction in Q3 2019. However, the Department has advised the school that if the project is in a position to commence construction earlier in 2019, the Department can facilitate this.

Schools Building Projects Status

125. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when construction

will commence for a school (details supplied) in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40953/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school to which the Deputy refers is at an advanced stage of the tender process. Subject to no issues arising the project is on target to commence construction in the fourth quarter of 2018.

Schools Building Projects Status

126. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a building project for a school (details supplied); if it can be considered for rapid build status; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40958/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy will be aware, the project to which he refers has been devolved for delivery to the local Education and Training Board.

This means that it is a matter for the ETB to appoint a Design Team to advance the project through the design and construction phases.

My Department considers that the ETB is best placed to deliver the project and it is happy that the devolved process will support its timely delivery.

Schools Building Projects Status

127. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a building project for a school (details supplied); if it can be considered for rapid build status; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40959/18]

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

I wish to inform the Deputy that the project is progressing to the architectural planning stage and is expected to be delivered by an external agency to my Department. Arrangements are currently being made in this regard and my Department will be in further contact with the school when these arrangements have been finalised.

School Accommodation Provision

128. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the funding that has been secured for a school (details supplied) in 2018; the way in which this funding is to be used; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40978/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that funding was recently approved to enable the school in question to build two mainstream classrooms with en-suite toilets and a separate assisted users toilet.

The project has been devolved for delivery to the school authority. This means that it is now a matter for the school authority to appoint a consultant and to advance the project through the design and construction phases.

School Funding

129. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if extra funding is available for primary schools that have a split campus in view of the additional costs involved in running buildings in two separate locations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40991/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Funding for all primary schools in the free education scheme is dealt with on a per capita basis.

The two main grants are the capitation grant to cater for day to day running costs such as heating, lighting, cleaning, insurance, general up-keep etc., and the ancillary services grant to cater for the cost of employing services staff.

Schools are permitted to regard the capitation and ancillary grant as a combined grant.

There is no provision for payments outside of what has been outlined above.

Education Grants

130. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated amount it would cost in 2019 if the ancillary grant rate increased by €5.50 per pupil; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41019/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The estimated full year cost of increasing the rate of ancillary grant by €5.50 per pupil in primary schools is circa €3.1m.

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

School Transport Provision

131. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the fact that some children attending ASD units in mainstream schools and that were entitled to special school transport are not receiving such transport and that Bus Éireann states it cannot get taxi companies to provide the service in certain cases; the steps that will be taken to address the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41024/18]

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.

Under the terms of the School Transport Scheme for Children with Special Educational Needs, children with special educational needs are eligible for school transport if they are at-

tending the nearest recognised mainstream or special school that is or can be resourced, to meet their special educational needs under Department of Education and Skills' criteria.

Eligibility is determined following consultation with the National Council for Special Education through its network of Special Education Needs Organisers. When applications are approved by my Department, Bus Éireann assesses the transport options available, taking into account the individual requirements of each child.

Where children can be facilitated on an existing service, applications are processed as soon as possible and arrangements put in place with the families involved.

Where a new service has to be established there is a lead in period for this process that includes the following:

- Route design

- Procurement/tender process for each new service required

- Contract award

- Possible vetting of a new Driver

- Time period for school to source a suitable escort

In some locations such as Dublin and Cork Bus Éireann has informed my Department that they are facing challenges on occasion in finding suitable vehicles, required to meet the transport needs of individual children.

Bus Éireann are very conscious of the challenges faced by Parents awaiting Special Needs transport and are continuing to work with my Department on a daily basis to source and provide transport where possible for all outstanding applicants.

Families of children who are eligible for special educational needs school transport may avail of the Special Transport Grant towards the cost of private transport arrangements until services are finalised.

School Transport Provision

132. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a school transport service will be provided for a person (details supplied). [41029/18]

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.

Under the terms of my Department's Post Primary School Transport scheme, children are eligible for transport where they reside not less than 4.8 kms from and are attending their nearest education centre as determined by the Department/Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language Bus Eireann was advised of a change of address at the end of September by the family referred to by the Deputy, and their application for school transport is currently being processed.

School Accommodation Provision

133. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on a matter regarding a school (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41056/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, my Department approved the provision of additional permanent accommodation, at the school in question, to replace prefabricated accommodation in poor condition.

Subsequently, the school submitted options to my Department to deliver additional specialist accommodation in addition to the accommodation previously approved. Having considered the school's proposal it was considered by my Department that there was no deficit of specialist accommodation and the school was advised accordingly.

Following further communication from the school the relevant Department Inspector was asked to visit the school and to report on the school's accommodation needs, having regard to the project approved. The Inspector's report is currently with my Department and a decision on the scope of the project will be advised directly to the school authority when a final decision has been made.

Education and Training Boards

134. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41057/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that factors for membership of a Public Sector Pension Scheme include:

- Employment in a public service body

- Access to the scheme being a specific condition included in the terms and conditions attached to the position, or in a written offer of employment

- There being a whole time comparator in the sector (in the case of part-time workers)

It is a matter for each Education and Training Board (ETB) to determine eligibility of applicant members in accordance with the relevant rules and regulations of the scheme.

However I am aware that the ETBs, through the Pension Task Group facilitated by my Department, are engaged with my Department officials to provide clarity on the position with regard to superannuation for certain staff in certain outdoor education centres to which the ETBs provide some funding, including the centre referred to by the Deputy.

School Staff

135. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if consideration will be given to a request made in respect of a school (details supplied) in County Cork. [41097/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The criteria used for the allocation of teaching posts is published annually on the Department website. The key factor

for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September.

The criteria for the appointment of an administrative principal to a school, which are enrolment related, are set out in Appendix B of Circular 0010/2018. There is no scope to deviate from these arrangements.

The enrolment required for the appointment of an administrative principal in ordinary schools is 176 pupils on 30th September 2017, or 113 pupils if the school is operating a specialist autism unit. As the enrolment of the school referred to by Deputy was 109 on 30th September 2017, the school does not meet the requirements for an administrative principal for the current school year.

The staffing schedule operates in a clear and transparent manner and treats all similar types of schools equally irrespective of location.

In Budget 2019, school leadership is again supported with an additional release day for teaching principals in primary schools and a further four additional release days for teaching principals in schools with special classes. These additional release days will be effective from 01 September 2019.

Schools Building Projects Status

136. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status and delivery time of the provision of a new primary school in Donabate; if the first of four schools to be provided as set out in the local area plan in Donabate is on the Spires East site in line with the policy (details supplied) on the use of State assets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41100/18]

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

Following on from the announcement, the locations for all of the schools, including the new primary school announced to serve Donabate, will be determined as part of the site process. Decisions are now being made in relation to appropriate sites for the schools announced and will be confirmed at a later date.

Schools Administration

137. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has considered the introduction of a one day per week release for all teaching principals of national schools further to the recommendations at the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Skills' 2018 summer meeting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41124/18]

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.

Any additional increase in the number of release days has to be considered as part of the budgetary process, alongside the many other demands from the education sector.

Residential Institutions Redress Scheme

138. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the 2017 annual report of Caranua's appeals officer will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41180/18]

139. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 423 of 20 June 2017 and 33 of 6 December 2017, the allocation of appeals officers at Caranua; the number of appeals officers working at Caranua; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41184/18]

140. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to establish a contingency fund in the event that Caranua application decisions are delayed by having to take the case to court or otherwise; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41185/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos.138 to 140, inclusive, together.

Section 21 of the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Act 2012 provides for the appointment by the Minister for Education and Skills of one or more than one person to act as an independent appeals officer to consider appeals against decisions of Caranua. Mr Patrick Whelan was appointed as appeals officer in February 2014 and served in that role for a period of some three years. In May 2017, I appointed Ms Geraldine Gleeson and Mr Brendan O'Leary to serve as appeals officers for a one year period. In May 2018, I offered a further period of appointment as an appeals officers to both Mr O'Leary and Ms Gleeson. Ms Gleeson advised that she was not in a position to continue in this role and I acknowledged this decision on 5th July 2018.

The question of appointing a second appeals officer will be kept under review having regard to the level of appeals on hands.

The annual report of the Caranua appeals officers, covering the period May 2017 to April 2018, has recently been laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas in fulfilment of the statutory requirement.

It is a matter for Caranua to ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place to make funding provision for any contingent liabilities that might arise from legal actions or for other reasons.

Special Educational Needs Staff

141. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated amount it would cost to recruit an extra 500 special needs assistants for the 2019/2020 school

year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41186/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The cost of employing 500 new Special Need Assistants in the 2019/2020 school year is estimated at €13.8m. This estimated cost includes the pay increases due in 2019 under the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018 to 2020 and employers PRSI.

Home Tuition Scheme Funding

142. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the maximum home tuition hours will be allocated to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41202/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The purpose of the Home Tuition Grant Scheme is to provide a compensatory educational service for students, enrolled in schools, with a significant medical condition, or school phobia and/or associated depression/anxiety, which has caused, and is likely to continue to cause, major disruption to their attendance at school.

Eligibility is assessed having regard to, although not limited to, the following criteria:

- The student's attendance levels during the previous school year - A relevant medical/professional report -a separate report may be requested in some cases if required.

Generally, grant aid based on a range of between 2 and 10 hours tuition may be approved with the allocation reflecting the level of attendance in the previous school year and whether the attendance was at primary or post primary level. As a general guide, up to 5 hours may be granted to students at primary level while students at post primary level may be granted between 2 and 10 hours.

Officials in my Department have confirmed that an application under the medical strand of the Home Tuition Grant Scheme has recently been received in relation to the person referred to by the Deputy. A decision letter will issue to the applicant in the coming days.

Questions Nos. 143 to 145, inclusive, answered with Question No. 79.

Legislative Measures

146. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a plain language Bill will be introduced in order to ensure communication with the general public is in layman's terms (details supplied). [41235/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): There are currently no plans to introduce plain language legislation.

However, plain English guidelines have been produced by the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA), who receive substantial funding from my Department, via SOLAS. NALA work with a range of bodies both in the public and private sectors to ensure that there is a focus on the use of plain English in their publications, web and broadcast material. The plain English guidelines aim to ensure that information is presented in a way that helps someone understand it the first time they read or hear it.

Question No. 147 answered with Question No. 80.

Skills Development

148. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason the net target for the national skills strategy has not increased for 2025 based on population in view of the fact that the population has increased since 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41237/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs published a report in 2007, "Tomorrow's Skills, Towards a National Skills Strategy" which contained a target that the percentage of the labour force at levels 1 -3 on the National Framework of Qualifications should decrease to 7% by 2020.

This indicator was carried over into Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025 which was published in January 2016. On inclusion in the strategy, the baseline figure was 15%, and the 7% target for 2020 was retained. The Strategy commits to reviewing this target in 2020, with a view to setting an appropriate revised target for 2025.

Literacy Levels

149. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the statistics are accurate on adult illiteracy; if so, the way in which childhood illiteracy will be addressed; the way in which childhood illiteracy is measured; the number of young children who were supported in this regard by county in each of the years 2011 to 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41240/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): The delivery and enhancement of adult literacy and numeracy provision is being driven through the implementation of the Further Education and Training (FET) Literacy and Numeracy Strategy which is contained in the FET Strategy 2014-19. My Department, along with SOLAS, the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and partner agencies are collaborating on the ongoing development and enhancement of the structures required to progress its implementation. The strategy sets out 12 inter- related elements which aim to promote, develop and encourage literacy and numeracy skills in the adult population. Progress to date includes the development and launch of the national awareness campaign, *'Take the First Step'*, development of national guidelines for the initial and on-going screening and assessment of participants and the publication of a number of research projects including the examination of integrating literacy and numeracy in FET programmes and an examination of barriers to participation in FET programmes. This year SOLAS has commissioned NALA to progress the evidence base to inform best practice in relation to family learning. It is envisaged that *Family Learning Best Practice Guidelines* will be available in early 2019.

The SOLAS allocation to Education and Training Boards (ETBs) for 2018 for adult literacy and basic skills provision is over €35m. Funding for further education and training (FET) is allocated to SOLAS, who then allocate to the 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.

The ETB Adult Literacy Service provides programmes with accreditation at levels NQF levels 1-4. Provision for adult literacy is delivered through a number of programmes;

- Adult Literacy groups (small groups)

- Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education (ITABE)- English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

- Skills for Work - workplace literacy courses- Voluntary Literacy provision (one-to-one tuition)

- Family Learning Programmes- Distance learning service.

The adult literacy programme is informed by a set of operational guidelines that include guidance on initial assessment and engagement and the importance of more intensive provision to support literacy acquisition. Less intensive provision can be useful in welcoming and engaging new learners back into education but the guidelines recognise that more intensive approaches are required to enable progression.

I also recently launched a new policy framework for employee development, 'Supporting Working Lives and Enterprise Growth in Ireland', which was developed by SOLAS in consultation with key partners. This new approach will enable targeted support for vulnerable groups in the Irish workforce as it has a particular focus on employees those who have lower skills levels and who need more opportunities to advance in their working lives and careers, to sustain their employment and to avoid displacement or to avail of emerging job opportunities. The policy sets a target of having over 40,000 workers, whose skills level is below Level 5 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), engaged in state supported skills development by 2021. It should be noted that while the NFQ is not a literacy scale but a qualifications framework, I am committed to addressing literacy issues amongst those whose highest level of qualification is below Level 5, including through achieving certification for their learning. This will supplement the numbers already being supported through our adult literacy programmes. Participation by employees in relevant courses will be provided free of charge.

In the National Skills Strategy 2025, targets are set to reduce the percentage of adults scoring at or below level 1 in the PIAAC survey from a baseline of 17.5% to 12% by 2025, and to increase the percentage of adults scoring at levels 2, 3 and 4 in the PIAAC survey from a baseline of 44% to 50% by 2025. The substantial investment already being made in adult literacy, supplemented by this new initiative to support those in employment, will also ensure that Ireland is well positioned to achieve these targets.

As regards childhood literacy, the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, launched in 2011, set out a vision for raising standards in our early years, primary and post-primary school settings. The 2017 Interim Review of the Strategy shows the significant progress which has been made under the Strategy since 2011, notably in promoting a high level of literacy for all. For example, the National Assessments of English Reading and Maths (NAERM) shows that the percentage of students at second class performing at the highest levels (Level 3 or above) in reading increased from 35% in 2009 to 46% in 2014; and the percentage of students at second class performing at the lowest levels (Level 1 or below) in reading decreased from 35% in 2009 to 22% in 2014. Substantial progress has also been made at post primary-level with the percentage of 15 year olds performing at the higher levels in reading as measured by the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) increasing from 29% in 2009 to 37% in 2015; and the percentage of 15 year olds performing at the lowest levels (at or below Level 1) decreased from 17% in 2009 to 10% in 2015. The average score achieved by Ireland's fifteen year olds in the PISA literacy assessment was second only to Finland in the European Union.

The Interim Review Report also shows areas for improvement such as a gap in achievement between learners in DEIS schools (in particular DEIS Band 1 schools in primary) and those in

other schools which must be addressed. Publication of the *DEIS Plan 2017* is a significant step and its implementation will be the vehicle for driving progress in terms of improving educational outcomes including literacy for pupils at greatest risk of not achieving their full potential. The Literacy and Numeracy review sets out additional actions with new and updated targets to 2020. Achievement of targets will be measured through the National Assessments of English Reading and Mathematics (NAERM) and Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).

Measurement on a county by county basis is not available, but the targets set out in the following document show the focus on reducing the gap between achievement in reading in DEIS Band 1 schools and pupils in all primary schools, and between students in DEIS post primary schools and students in all post primary schools.

Standardised testing is carried out at 2nd 4th and 6th classes at primary level and are used to measure the level of child's achievement in English and Irish reading and maths. They compare children's score with other children in the same class or age level. The purpose of these tests are to gather information on the level of the child's reading and maths to help the teachers plan each child's specific learning, and to inform the parent on how well their child is doing in school.

National Assessments of English reading (NAERM) – DEIS Band 1 Primary Schools

		Target for 2020 set in the 2011 Strategy	Current Position (NAERM 2014)	New Target to 2020
	Second class	No corresponding target in 2011 Strategy	18%	25%
Reading: At or above Level 3	Sixth class		21%	27%
	Second class		44%	40%
Reading: At or below Level 1	Sixth class		47%	40%

Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) – DEIS Post-Primary

		Target for 2020 set in the 2011 Strategy	Current Position (PISA 2015)	New Target to 2020
Reading Literacy: At or above Level 4	15 year olds	No corresponding target in 2011 Strategy	28%	33%
Reading Literacy: At or above Level 5(highest achievers)	15 year olds		7%	10%
Reading Literacy: At or below Level 1	15 year olds		16%	12%

Schools Building Projects Status

150. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans for the proposed extension of a school (details supplied); the status of the project; the timeline for completion of the works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41253/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The project to which the Deputy refers has been devolved for delivery to the local Education and Training Board (ETB).

Under this arrangement, it will be a matter for the ETB to appoint a Design Team for the design and construction phases of the project. As the project has not yet commenced architectural planning, it is too early in the process for a timeline for completion of the works.

Schools Building Projects Status

151. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the proposed extension to a school (details supplied); the status of proposed works; the timeline for the completion of the building project for the school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41255/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy 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, officials from my Department have undertaken a site visit to the school.

The building project for this school will be devolved to Kildare Wicklow Education and Training Board (KWETB) for delivery and my Department is currently engaging with KWETB in this regard.

Ministerial Communications

152. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there is a policy regarding ministerial use of private email for Government business in his Department; and if so, if it will be published. [41521/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department does not have a specific policy regarding Ministerial use of private email addresses to conduct Government business. However, as stated in parliamentary responses reference number 38550/18 and 39582/16, from late 2016 I have only used dedicated Department email addresses to communicate official Department business.

The Information Technology Unit of my Department regularly issue emails to Departmental staff reminding them that personally owned mobile devices and removable media devices are not permitted to connect to Departmental workstations and must not be used to store Departmental information.

Immigration Status

153. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of applications by persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40832/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the applicants referred to can expect a decision from the New Delhi Visa Office on their visa applications within the next two weeks. The applicants will be advised directly in that regard.

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

In addition, applicants may themselves e-mail queries directly to *visamail@justice.ie.*

Naturalisation Eligibility

154. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41088/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will be aware that the granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is governed by the provisions of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended. All applications for a certificate of naturalisation are processed and assessed individually in accordance with the provisions of the Act. A determination on whether an applicant satisfies the statutory criteria attendant to naturalisation can only be made after an application is received.

There is specific provision made in the Act in relation to persons resident in the Island of Ireland. Section 15A provides that, where the application is based on being the spouse or civil partner of an Irish citizen the requirements are, inter alia, that the couple are married or civil partners to each other for a period of at least 3 years and are living together and, immediately before the date of application, have a period of one year's continuous residence in the island of Ireland and, during the preceding four years, have a further period amounting to 2 years (i.e. 3 years in total).

It is also open to an applicant generally to apply under Section16(a) of the 1956 Act where the applicant is of Irish descent or associations. In such cases the Minister may in his absolute discretion waive (any) of the conditions for naturalisation set out under Section 15 of the Act, including residency. The onus is on the applicant to provide evidence of Irish descent or Irish association to the Minister for consideration.

Detailed information on Irish citizenship and naturalisation, along with the relevant application forms and guidance notes, is available on the INIS website at ww.inis.gov.ie.

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

Court Orders

155. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of drivers disqualified in court in each of the years 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40935/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy is aware, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service, which is independent in exercising its functions, and this includes the provision of information on the courts system.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has provided the Report in the following table which sets out the number of drivers disqualified in court in each of the years 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018.

Year	No of Defendants Disqualified from Driving
Jan - Dec 2016	7,539
Jan - Dec 2017	9,131
Jan – 20 Sep 2018	6,499

Ministerial Meetings

156. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will meet with a person (details supplied) in relation ongoing difficulties they have in achieving justice. [40609/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I can inform the Deputy that my Department wrote to the person in question on 6 June 2018 to provide them with an update in relation to their request for a meeting.

The Deputy will appreciate that I, as Minister, have no role in relation to the management of Garda investigations or, indeed, the prosecution or trial of alleged offences. This is a long-standing principle of our system of justice. The role of An Garda Síochána is to investigate alleged offences, to gather whatever evidence may be available and to submit a report to the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP). Any information in relation to possible criminal acts should be provided directly to An Garda Síochána for investigation. The question of whether or not a particular person should be prosecuted and for what criminal offence is the responsibility of the DPP, who is completely independent in carrying out her functions.

Similarly, the Courts, subject only to the Constitution and the law, are independent in the exercise of their judicial functions and the conduct of any court case is a matter entirely for the presiding judge. It is not open to me to comment or intervene in any way in relation to how particular proceedings are conducted or, indeed, on the outcome of such proceedings.

If someone is not satisfied with the manner in which their complaints have been handled by An Garda Síochána, then it is open to them to contact the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Office (GSOC). GSOC, as you are no doubt aware, is the independent body charged with receiving complaints from the public concerning members of An Garda Síochána.

Unfortunately, it is not open to me to intervene in this case in the manner the person in question is seeking. It is An Garda Síochána, specifically the Garda Commissioner and his management team, who are responsible for investigating all forms of alleged criminality in the State in the first instance and not the Minister for Justice and Equality. Accordingly, I cannot accede to this particular meeting request.

Notwithstanding the above, it is, of course, open to the person in question to seek independent legal advice in relation to their concerns, if they so wish.

Immigration Policy

157. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when a response will issue to the Luximon judgment; and when the system will be modified in order to take account of that judgment. [40626/18]

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

I expect to be announcing details of the response in the near future.

Visa Data

158. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 451 of 26 July 2017, when a response from the INIS is likely to be forthcoming. [40627/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service of my Department that the information requested is held by An Garda Síochána and the reply is being compiled by them. I will write to the Deputy again as soon as the information is available.

Drugs Crime

159. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the measures being taken to address dealing and distribution of crack cocaine, particularly in areas of Dublin and County Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40709/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I wish to inform the Deputy that I have requested a report from the Garda authorities in relation to the matter and I will revert to him when the report is to hand.

Drugs in Prisons

160. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will report on the use of crack cocaine among the prison population; the number of persons who have access to detox beds in the medical units of each prison in each of the years 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40710/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Irish Prison Service is committed to preventing, or reducing the flow of contraband into the prison estate, and has confirmed that the methods it uses to do so are under constant review.

I am advised by my officials in the Irish Prison Service that to date in 2018 there have been two documented instances of crack cocaine being found by Irish Prison Service staff.

It is the policy of the Irish Prison Service that where a person committed to prison gives a history of opiate use and tests positive for opioids, they are offered a medically assisted symptomatic detoxification, if clinically indicated. Prisoners can, as part of the assessment process, discuss with healthcare staff other treatment options, which may include stabilisation on methadone maintenance for persons who wish to continue on maintenance, while in prison and when they return to the community on release.

There are 27 beds in the Medical Unit, Mountjoy Prison, which are available to prisoners for slow detoxification and stabilisation. There are also 9 beds in this Medical Unit, which are available for a 9 week drug treatment programme. While there are strict criteria governing a patients admission to the drug treatment programme, the programme is open to prisoners for all locations in the prison estate.

The Irish Prison Service has advised that 80 prisoners participated in the drug treatment programme during 2016, 45 persons participated in 2017, and 45 persons have also participated in the programme to date in 2018.

Garda Investigations

161. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the investigation into the deaths of persons (details supplied) will be reopened in order to investigate matters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40717/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will appreciate that the manner in which Garda investigations are carried out, including any decision made to reopen a particular case, is solely a matter for the Garda Commissioner and his management team and I, as Minister, have no role in such matters.

However, to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have made arrangements for his concerns to be brought to the attention of the Garda authorities for their attention and whatever action is deemed necessary.

Garda Deployment

162. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the allocation of gardaí to Nenagh divisional district and the rank of each in 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40724/18]

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

The information requested by the Deputy as provided by the Garda Commissioner from 2016 is available on my Department's website through the following link.

Garda Nos. 2009-2018

For more general information on Garda Facts and Figures please see http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/An_Garda_Siochana_facts_and_figures.

Road Traffic Offences Data

163. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons charged with selling off-road vehicles including scramblers to underage persons in each of the years 2015 to 2017 and to date in 2018; the number of persons charged with the misuse of off-road vehicles, including scramblers in each of the years 2015 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40734/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have requested a report from An Garda Síochána in relation to the statistics sought by the Deputy and I will be in con-

tact with the Deputy again on receipt of a Garda report.

Courts Service

164. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the funding provided to the Courts Service in 2016, 2017 and 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40747/18]

165. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the funding provided to the Circuit Court in 2016, 2017 and 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40748/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 164 and 165 together.

As the Deputy is aware, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998 management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service, which is independent in exercising its functions, which include the provision of information on the courts system.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that the information sought by the Deputy in relation to the funding provided to the Circuit Court in 2016, 2017 and 2018 is not available. Courts Service funding is not allocated by court jurisdiction but instead by areas of expenditure across all jurisdictions and therefore it is not possible to provide the budgetary data requested by the Deputy.

The funding to agencies under the remit of my Department is provided through the annual estimates process. The information in respect of the Courts Service Vote is set out below.

The Gross Funding includes funding for Pay, Non-Pay Current and Capital. Net Funding is the Gross Funding less the Appropriations-in-Aid (income) element of the Courts Service Voted funds.

Annual Exchequer Funding to the Courts Service: 2016 - 2018

Year	Total Gross Funding	Appropriations in Aid	Total Net Funding
	€'000	€'000	€'000
2018	131,575	47,969	83,606
2017	140,080*	47,828	92,252
2016	113,172	47,503	65,669

* Included in the 2017 budget is funding for the once-off up-front VAT payment in relation to PPP Projects.

Source: Revised Estimates Volume for the respective years.

Citizenship Applications

166. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of citizenship for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40762/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the processing of the ap-

plication for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy is on-going and I understand that the case is due to be submitted to me for my decision shortly.

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

It is recognised that all applicants for citizenship would wish to have a decision on their application without delay. While most straightforward cases are now processed within six months, the nature of the naturalisation process is such that, for a broad range of reasons, some cases will take longer than others to process. In some instances, completing the necessary checks can take a considerable period of time.

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

Garda Overtime

167. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of hours' overtime claimed by gardaí by Garda district; and the percentage of hours worked by gardaí in each district. [40766/18]

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 of overtime hours by District, as requested by the Deputy.

I am advised by the Garda authorities that calculating the total figure of regular tour hours worked by Garda members during 2017 would take a disproportionate amount of time to calculate, bearing in mind the nature of Garda rosters and other factors such as special leave, sick leave, secondments and so on.

More generally, I would like to assure the Deputy that I have 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.

Courts Service

168. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there have been reports commissioned in relation to court efficiency and sitting times; if these reports have been published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40767/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Programme for a Partnership Government contains a commitment to commission an annual study on court efficiency and sitting times as outlined by the Deputy and my Department has examined options to develop the most effective approach to implementing this commitment.

Ireland contributes annually to the European Commission EU Justice Scoreboard report which provides comparable data on the independence, quality, and efficiency of national justice systems. Ireland also contributes to the Council of Europe, European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ) report which compares data on justice systems and court efficiencies from 47 countries. Both reports are available online at www.ec.europa.eu and www.coe.int respectively. These reports assist in providing ongoing international benchmarking which can be used as reference points when undertaking analysis of Ireland's justice system.

It should be noted, however, that when assessing international comparisons of judicial systems we must be mindful of anomalies that can arise when comparing data and comparisons that are not necessarily appropriate due to differing systems reflecting different geographical, economic and legal systems.

In March 2017, it was announced that a Group, to be chaired by the President of the High Court, Mr. Justice Peter Kelly, would be established to review and reform the administration of civil justice in theState. It is intended that the Programme for Government commitment regarding a study on court efficiency and waiting times will be incorporated into the review of the administration of civil justice.

The Group is to report to the Minister for Justice and Equality and will make recommendations for changes with a view to improving access to civil justice in the State.

The Group is comprised of representatives from each jurisdiction of the judiciary, the Courts Service, the Office of the Attorney General, the Office of the Chief State Solicitor, the Law Society, the Bar Council, the Department of An Taoiseach, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Department of Justice and Equality.

The Review of the Administration of Civil Justice held its first meeting in November 2017 and has met regularly since then. The Review Group issued an open call for submissions, with a deadline of 30 June 2018, on the following broad topical areas in an overall context of improving access to justice and reducing costs of litigation:

(a) Improving procedures and practices and removal of obsolete, unnecessary or over-complex rules of procedure;

(b) Reviewing the law of discovery;

(c) Encouraging alternative methods of dispute resolution;

(d) Reviewing the use of electronic methods of communications including e-litigation and possibilities for making court documents (including submissions and pleadings) available or accessible on the internet;

(e) Achieving more effective outcomes for court users, particularly vulnerable court users.

The Review Group is currently considering the submissions received and it is anticipated that the Review Group will submit their report to me in 2019.

Garda Transport Provision

169. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to the vehicles in the Garda fleet in County Louth; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that gardaí cannot carry out their duties properly due to the unavailability of vehicles for use in community policing; the way in which investment from the €6 million announced in 2017 to enhance the Garda fleet has been invested in County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40837/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will be aware that there has been very significant investment in Garda resources across the State in recent years. The Government's Capital Plan 2016 – 2021 provides €46 million for investment in the Garda fleet, to ensure that An Garda Síochána has a modern, effective and fit-for-purpose fleet, in addition to the investment of almost €30 million in the period 2013 to 2015. In total in the period 2013 - 2017, almost €44 million has been invested in the fleet with some 2,000 vehicles coming on stream to ensure that Gardaí can be mobile, visible and responsive on the roads and in the community to prevent and tackle crime.

As the Deputy will appreciate, decisions in relation to the provision and allocation of Garda vehicles across the various Garda divisions are a matter for the Commissioner in light of his identified operational demands and the availability of resources. As Minister, I have no direct role in that matter.

I understand however that Garda management keeps the distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure their optimum use. Responsibility for the efficient deployment of all official vehicles in each Division is assigned to the Divisional Officer, who may allocate vehicles between districts and stations as required by operational requirements.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that in 2017, 17 vehicles were purchased on behalf of the Northern Region, 6 of which were allocated to Louth Division. I am informed that these 6 vehicles comprised 4 cars and 2 vans.

I am further informed that in 2018, 25 vehicles were purchased on behalf of the Northern Region, 19 of which have been allocated to date, including 3 to Louth Division, namely 1 car, 1 van and 1 motorcycle. The remaining 6 vehicles are in the course of delivery to Northern Region and are awaiting allocation.

Finally, the Deputy may wish to be aware that under the Capital Plan already referred to, €10 million will be made available to An Garda Síochána for the purchase of vehicles in 2019.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that in all the circumstances, they are satisfied there are sufficient resources to address the fleet requirements in the Louth Division.

Garda Resources

170. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the estimated amount it would cost in 2019 if the budget for An Garda Síochána increased by 5%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40870/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will be aware that the Garda Commissioner is the Accounting Officer for the Garda Vote and as such is responsible for the effective and efficient use of the resources at his disposal.

Those resources have reached unprecedented levels, with an allocation for An Garda Síochána for 2018 of €1,650,209,000, as per the Revised Estimates for Public Services 2018.

This budgetary provision as well as the significant capital investment in An Garda Síochána in recent years are in support of the Government's commitment to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country, to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and deter crime.

A 5% increase in the 2018 allocation would bring the total to €1,732,719,450.

Garda Transport Expenditure

171. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the estimated amount it would cost in 2019 of increasing the budget for purchasing new Garda vehicles by 20%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40871/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will be aware that there has been very significant investment in Garda resources across the State in recent years. The Government's Capital Plan 2016 – 2021 provides €46 million for investment in the Garda fleet, to ensure that An Garda Síochána has a modern, effective and fit-for-purpose fleet, in addition to the investment of almost €30 million in the period 2013 to 2015. In total in the period 2013 - 2017, almost €44 million has been invested in the fleet with some 2,000 vehicles coming on stream to ensure that Gardaí can be mobile, visible and responsive on the roads and in the community to prevent and tackle crime.

€4.7 million was available for the purchase of vehicles for the Garda fleet in 2018. A 20% increase to this figure would represent a sum of €940,000.

However, it should be noted that under the Capital Plan, €10 million will be available to An Garda Síochána for the purchase of vehicles in 2019.

Garda Operations

172. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of test purchases carried out by gardaí in the R and J districts under the Intoxicating Liquor Act 2008 in 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; the frequency with which these test purchases are carried out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40882/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have sought a report from the Garda authorities on this matter and I will contact the Deputy directly when the information is to hand.

Garda Transport Data

173. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the details of the capital funding of €6 million which was allocated in 2017 to enhance the Garda fleet of vehicles by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40891/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will be aware that there has been very significant investment in Garda resources across the State in recent years. The Government's Capital Plan 2016 – 2021 provides €46 million for investment in the Garda fleet, to ensure that An Garda Síochána has a modern, effective and fit-for-purpose fleet, in addition to the investment of almost €30 million in the period 2013 to 2015. In total in the period 2013 - 2017, almost €44 million has been invested in the fleet with some 2,000 vehicles coming on stream to ensure that Gardaí can be mobile, visible and responsive on the roads and in the community to prevent and tackle crime.

As the Deputy will appreciate, decisions in relation to the provision and allocation of Garda vehicles across the various Garda divisions are a matter for the Commissioner in light of his identified operational demands and the availability of resources. As Minister, I have no direct role in that matter.

I understand however that Garda management keeps the distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure their optimum use. Responsibility for the efficient deployment of all official vehicles in each Division is assigned to the Divisional Officer, who may allocate vehicles between districts and stations as required by operational requirements.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the following table details the Garda vehicles allocated by Division or Unit during 2017. I am informed that it is not in all cases possible to identify what county these vehicles were allocated to, as some Divisions incorporate two counties and vehicles are distributed within a Division based on operational requirements.

It is important to note that this table refers to vehicles allocated. The Garda authorities indicate that these allocations may include vehicles which were purchased in 2016, but in relation to which the technical fit-out process was not completed until 2017. Similarly, this table would not include any vehicles purchased in 2017 which were not allocated until 2018 because the technical fit-out process for the vehicles were not completed until that point.

	Cars	Vans	Motorcycles	4X4	Other	Total
Cavan-Monaghan	4	1	0	0	0	5
Clare	5	1	0	0	0	6
Cork City	10	4	0	0	2	16
Cork North	4	1	0	0	0	5
Cork West	4	0	0	0	0	4
DMR East	5	1	0	0	0	6
DMR North	7	4	0	0	0	11
DMR North Central	6	1	0	0	1	8

	Cars	Vans	Motorcycles	4X4	Other	Total
DMR South	6	1	0	0	0	7
DMR South Central	9	1	0	0	0	10
DMR Traffic	2	1	0	0	0	3
DMR West	5	0	0	0	0	5
Donegal	3	0	0	0	1	4
Galway	8	1	0	0	1	10
H.R.M. Incl. Garda College	21	0	0	1	0	22
Headquarters	2	0	0	0	1	3
Kerry	4	1	0	0	0	5
Kildare	6	1	0	1	0	8
Kilkenny-Carlow	5	2	0	1	4	12
Laois-Offaly	6	0	0	1	0	7
Limerick	3	1	0	1	0	5
Louth	4	2	0	0	0	6
Mayo	4	1	0	0	0	5
Meath	4	2	0	0	0	6
National Units	33	7	2	4	15	61
Roscommon	4	4	0	0	0	8
Sligo-Leitrim	2	0	0	0	0	2
Technical Bureau	1	0	0	1	0	2
Tipperary	7	1	0	0	0	8
Waterford	4	1	0	0	1	6
Westmeath	3	1	0	0	1	5
Wexford	5	0	0	0	0	5
Wicklow	8	1	0	1	0	10
Total	204	42	2	11	27	286

Garda Transport Data

174. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of marked and unmarked Garda cars and vans in the Dublin region that have been scrapped to date in 2018 due to fact that they exceeded 300,000 km mileage and-or exceeded ten years of age. [40925/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will be aware that there has been very significant investment in Garda resources across the State in recent years. The Government's Capital Plan 2016 – 2021 provides €46 million for investment in the Garda fleet, to ensure that An Garda Síochána has a modern, effective and fit-for-purpose fleet, in addition to the investment of almost €30 million in the period 2013 to 2015. In total in the period 2013 - 2017, almost €44 million has been invested in the fleet with some 2,000 vehicles coming on stream to ensure that Gardaí can be mobile, visible and responsive on the roads and in the community to prevent and tackle crime.

As the Deputy will appreciate, decisions in relation to the provision and allocation of Garda vehicles across the various Garda divisions are a matter for the Commissioner in light of his identified operational demands and the availability of resources. As Minister, I have no direct

role in that matter.

I understand however that Garda management keeps the distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure their optimum use. Responsibility for the efficient deployment of all official vehicles in each Division is assigned to the Divisional Officer, who may allocate vehicles between districts and stations as required by operational requirements.

I understand that An Garda Síochána operate a comprehensive service repair and maintenance programme to ensure that all vehicles in the fleet are operating to manufacturers specifications. All vehicles are operated up to the manufacturers durability limits (which range between 300,000 to 500,000km depending on vehicle type) or uneconomic repair irrespective of age.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the following table outlines the cars and vans which have been removed from the Garda fleet in the Dublin Metropolitan Region between January and September 2018.

Cars			Vans		
Marked	Unmarked	Total	Marked	Unmarked	Total
6	40	46	4	9	13

Garda Complaints Data

175. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of complaints made to An Garda Síochána by insurers under section 19(1) of the Criminal Justice Act 2011 in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40955/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have requested a report from An Garda Síochána in relation to the statistics sought by the Deputy and I will be in contact with the Deputy again on receipt of a Garda report.

Visa Applications

176. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there has been a delay and a change in criteria for Venezuelan nationals applying for visas here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40974/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that Venezuelan nationals are required to obtain a visa in order to travel to Ireland. A visa required person must apply for a visa for the particular purpose of their visit. Such applications are processed under delegated sanction by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, more specifically in this case by the Irish Embassy in Mexico.

Any person who wishes to come to Ireland from a visa required country must fulfil the relevant criteria for the particular visa application, i.e. study, employment, join family, volunteer, Minister of Religion, etc. There has been no change in the criteria, and the onus rests at all times with the applicant to satisfy the Visa Officer that the visa sought for whatever purpose should be granted.

Further information is generally available on the Embassy of Ireland's website in Mexico,

and on the INIS website at www.inis.gov.ie. However, it should be noted that the information on the website does not limit the discretion of a Visa Officer from seeking additional information. Each visa application is thus assessed on its individual merits, and circumstances including the complexity and length of time taken to process an application can inevitably vary from one individual to another.

Garda Oversight

177. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the delay in relation to the case of a person (details supplied) will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40984/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As I advised the Deputy in response to question 397 on 7 September 2018, issues relating to the formal sharing of information between An Garda Síochána and the GSOC for investigative purposes are of an operational nature and, as such, I have no role in this process.

Section 67 of the Garda Síochána Act states that the Ombudsman Commission shall be independent in the performance of its functions. It also provides that the Ombudsman Commission has all powers that are necessary for, or incidental to, the performance of its functions.

An Garda Síochána and GSOC have developed an extensive protocol which governs the sharing of information relevant to an active investigation being conducted by the Commission. This protocol sets out the responsibilities of both parties and provides a detailed process of escalation where certain records or information has not yet been provided.

With specific reference to the matter raised by the Deputy, it must be stressed that as this relates to an active investigation under consideration with GSOC, I cannot interfere with or influence that investigative process. To do otherwise could be construed as interfering with the independence of the Commission. Therefore, I hope that the Deputy will appreciate that it would not be appropriate for me to comment further in the matter.

Road Safety

178. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the policy change in relation to speed limit vans on motorways (details supplied) was changed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40985/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will appreciate that I have no role in relation to road traffic enforcement, which is an operational matter appropriate to the Garda Commissioner. I have requested a report from An Garda Síochána in relation to the matter referred to by the Deputy, and I will be in contact again with the Deputy on receipt of a Garda report.

Visa Waiver Programme

179. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to establish a visa waiver programme for diplomatic passport holders from Georgia; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40990/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The requirements for which countries are visa required to come to Ireland are kept under regular review in consultation with my colleague, the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade. As indicated previously, there are no plans to implement the change referred to by the Deputy.

My Department is pursuing a strategy of greater co-ordination and co-operation on visa issues with the United Kingdom in the context of the Common Travel Area (CTA). This is exemplified by the operation of the British Irish Visa Scheme in China and India which allows for travel to and around Ireland and the UK on a single visa.

As part of this greater co-operation, the matter of alignment of those States whose citizens are visa required is also being kept under review. The greater the extent of alignment between the two jurisdictions, the greater the opportunity to increase the numbers of tourism and business visits to the CTA. At present, both Ireland and the UK require all citizens of Georgia to be in possession of a visa for travel to their jurisdiction and thus it remains the position that any proposals for change will need to be considered in this context.

Residency Permits

180. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 264 of 2 October 2018, the options now available to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40992/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned had his permission to remain in the State renewed for a three year period, to 25th October, 2018. This decision was conveyed in writing to the person concerned by letter dated 7th October, 2015. This communication advised the person concerned of the conditions attaching to his permission to remain and of the requirement that he attend at his local Garda Registration Office to have the registration process completed. This person was also advised that future renewals of the permission to remain should be applied for two weeks in advance of the permission expiring to the local District Headquarters station.

This individual was also informed that the Certificate is an important document and should be kept safely along with the original leave to remain letter from the INIS. It is the current policy of this department not to re-issue permission letters unless the original letter is returned to the department. The letter has to date not been returned to this Department. Therefore there is no onus on this department to re-issue the permission letter at this current time.

Unfortunately, and for reasons relating to fraud prevention, the INIS is not in a position to issue another version of the permission to remain decision letter, dated 07th October, 2015.

However, there is no requirement for an applicant to possess that decision letter when renewing permission to remain in the State with their local immigration registration office. When attending the local registration office for the purposes of renewing permission to remain, the applicant should bring with them: the Certificate of Registration (GNIB card) valid between 2015 and 2018, a valid passport, and the electronic means to pay the requisite registration fee.

Should the applicant have misplaced the Certificate of Registration and not be able to locate it before renewing permission to remain, then they should have in their possession their GNIB number, and further proof of your identity when attending the local immigration registration office.

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

Legislative Reviews

181. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to update the Succession Act 1965 in order to simplify and expedite the administration of estates particularly in non-contentious cases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41015/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The position is that the Courts Service recently undertook a broad review of the operation of the Probate Office and District Probate Registries. The review involved a wide consultation exercise, including consulting with legal practitioners and customers. The results of the review, which have been endorsed by the Board of the Courts Service, contain a number of recommendations for more effective and efficient delivery of the probate service.

The recommendations include the development of a new ICT platform for the Probate Office and District Probate Registries which will enable online filing of applications for grants of probate and grants of administration. I am informed that a Project Board to oversee the design and implementation of the new platform will be established in the near future.

The Review has also recommended that certain functions should be transferred from the Probate Office to the District Probate Registries and draft Rules of Court are in preparation with a view to giving effect to this recommendation. The intention is to free up resources in the Probate Office in Dublin in order to process more grants of probate and administration.

I should add that additional resources have been allocated to the Probate Office in recent months and this has led to a significant reduction in processing times for applications for grants of representation. At present, the processing time for a solicitor's application is approximately 5 to 6 weeks, while in the case of personal applications the waiting time is 10 to 15 weeks.

While I have no plans to introduce amending legislation in this area, the operation of existing legislation is kept under review in my Department.

Garda Station Refurbishment

182. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if funding will be approved for the refurbishment of a Garda unit (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41020/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The programme of replacement and refurbishment of Garda accommodation is progressed by the Garda authorities working in close cooperation with the Office of Public Works (OPW), which has the responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation. As Minister I have no direct role in the matter.

I can confirm that accommodation for the Garda Water Unit in Athlone is included in the Garda Station Building and Programme 2016-2021.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the OPW has developed a scheme to provide for suitable accommodation for personnel attached to the Garda Water Unit, which will cater for the needs of the Water Unit both in respect of office facilities as well as all other accommodation requirements related to their role and function.

I understand from the Garda authorities that the main contract in relation to these works is currently out to tender. The next phase will be for the OPW to engage in tender assessment and evaluation. I am informed that it is not possible at this stage to advise on a specific commencement date for the works in question, until such a time as tenders are assessed and evaluated.

Garda Vetting

183. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the rules under Garda vetting will be amended to allow a person that has been vetted to be issued with a card that proves they have been vetted (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41027/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will appreciate that the primary purpose of the employment vetting carried out by the Garda National Vetting Bureau is to seek to ensure the safety of children and vulnerable adults and it is carried out by An Garda Síochána primarily in accordance with the provisions of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012-2016.

Vetting checks are conducted by the Garda National Vetting Bureau for each new vetting application received to ensure that the most recent data available is taken into account. This is because once there has been any significant lapse of time between one employment and another, the original vetting disclosure must be reviewed to take account of any changes in information, such as more recent criminal convictions. Furthermore, the data protection law requires that any sensitive personal data which employers use in regard to their employees must be current, accurate and up-to-date. Importantly, the general non-transferability and contemporaneous nature of the current process also helps to protect against the risk of fraud or forgery in the process.

I am pleased to inform the Deputy that at present, 80% of overall vetting applications are being processed by the National Vetting Bureau in five working days. This efficiency has been achieved by the deployment of the e-Vetting system which facilitates the on-line processing of applications for vetting from registered organisations. The e-Vetting system is available to all registered organisations and the Garda Authorities are ready to assist those organisations who are not yet using the e-Vetting system to do so. In circumstances where there is such a sustained reduction in processing times, the issue of vetting "transferability" is largely obviated.

That said, there are certain limited circumstances where organisations can share a single vetting disclosure where this is agreed to by the vetting applicant. Section 12(3)(A) of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012 (as amended) provides that two or more relevant organisations can enter into a joint written agreement in relation to the employment, contracting, permitting or placement of an person to undertake relevant work or activities thereby providing for only one of the organisations being required to conduct vetting in respect of that person.

Sexual Offences Data

184. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the report

from the scoping group chaired by a person (details supplied) was presented to him; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41040/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy is aware, late last year a Scoping Group was established by my Department to consider the availability of data and make recommendations on a study to identify the prevalence of sexual abuse and violence in Ireland today, as well as any emerging trends.

The group was made up of experts and relevant Department officials and was chaired by Professor Dorothy Watson, associate research professor, ESRI, and adjunct professor of sociology at Trinity College Dublin.

The Group completed a draft report and submitted it to me for consideration in April of this year. There was a requirement for further work to be carried out by my Department with a view to advancing the proposals in the report which included consultation with the Office of the Attorney General. Work is currently underway to resolve these issues and I intend to bring proposals to Government in the coming weeks.

Immigration Status

185. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of an application in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41048/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that it wrote to the person concerned on 4 October, 2018 requesting further information and documentation. I understand that INIS will give full consideration to the person's request for permission to reside in this State upon receipt of a response from the person concerned.

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

Wards of Court

186. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to provide independent oversight of the investments and management of wards' funds in view of his decision to not allow the Comptroller and Auditor General to audit these funds. [41109/18]

187. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will consider introducing an amendment to Article 33 of the Constitution which would allow the Comptroller and Auditor General legislation to be amended in order to audit wards of court funds. [41110/18]

188. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on whether the auditing of wards of court funds is an administrative matter involving civil servants and external agents rather than the administration of justice and as such it does not come under Article 35 of the Constitution. [41111/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 186 to 188, inclusive, together.

As the Deputy is aware, the High Court has jurisdiction in wards of court matters and management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service, which is independent in exercising its functions under the Courts Service Act 1998.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has advised that there is already independent oversight of the investment and management of wards' funds. These funds are independently audited by external auditors in compliance with Generally Accepted Auditing Standards (GAAP) and the audited financial statements are published.

The Deputy may also be aware that section 5(1)(a) of the Comptroller and Auditor General (Amendment) Act 1993 expressly excludes the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) from auditing a fund under the control of the courts. While my Department has examined the proposal to amend the 1993 Act to allow wards of court funds to be audited by the C&AG, I am advised that it is considered to be incompatible with the Constitution's architecture and not consistent with Article 33.1.

Article 33.1 provides *"There shall be a Comptroller and Auditor General to control on behalf of the State all disbursements and to audit all accounts of moneys administered by or under the authority of the Oireachtas"*. The fact that the wardship funds are not public funds and are subject to the control and supervision of the High Court are considered to be essential obstacles to providing that the C&AG may audit such funds. In addition, it is considered that legislating for C&AG oversight of these funds could also undermine the independence of the judiciary and the administration of justice under Articles 34.1 and 35.2 of the Constitution.

My Department is not minded at this time to propose any amendments to Article 33 of the Constitution.

Finally, as I have already stated, the High Court has jurisdiction in wards of court matters and given the High Court jurisdiction, it is not appropriate for me, as the Minister, to express a view in relation to whether the auditing of wards of court funds is an administrative matter or otherwise.

Wards of Court

189. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he has received a set of 29 questions (details supplied) regarding the investment and administration of wards of court funds which have been sent to his Department and to the Courts Service but have not to date been addressed by the Courts Service; if he has had engagement with the Courts Service in regard to a reply to these questions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41112/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy is aware, the High Court has jurisdiction in Wards of Court matters and management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service, which is independent in exercising its functions under the Courts Service Act 1998.

The correspondence referred to by the Deputy has been received and is currently being addressed by my Department and the Courts Service. A reply will be issued in due course.

Citizenship Applications

190. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of a citizenship application by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41143/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the processing of the application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy is on-going. On completion of the necessary processing the application will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible.

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

It is recognised that all applicants for citizenship would wish to have a decision on their application without delay. While most straightforward cases are now processed within six months, the nature of the naturalisation process is such that, for a broad range of reasons, some cases will take longer than others to process. In some instances, completing the necessary checks can take a considerable period of time.

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

Naturalisation Eligibility

191. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there are circumstances in which a person (details supplied) would be allowed to apply for naturalisation or other long-term permission to remain here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41251/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that it is not possible to provide a targeted response in the absence of more detailed information in relation to the person concerned. I am further advised that a permission on Stamp 0 conditions is a low level immigration status which is not intended to be reckonable for long term residence or citizenship.

It is, however, open to any person to apply to the Minister for Justice and Equality for a certificate of naturalisation and each case will be considered on its individual merits. The grant of naturalisation is at the absolute discretion of the Minister for Justice and Equality who will have regard to the circumstances of the application. Further information on eligibility for applying for citizenship by naturalisation and other immigration pathways that may be available to the person concerned is available at www.inis.gov.ie.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the INIS of my Department by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be

obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from the INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Ministerial Communications

192. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there is a policy regarding ministerial use of private email for Government business in his Department; and if so, if it will be published. [41527/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): My Department's Policy on Acceptable Use of ICT Resources covers all users of the Department's ICT resources, and addresses the use of non-official email.

The policy has recently been revised and the latest version is now available on the website of my Department in the Publications section, under Corporate Documents.

Official Engagements

193. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he and or officials in his Department attended the 2018 Ryder Cup; if so, the reason they attended; the days on which they attended; the officials they met from a Ryder Cup organisation or the European Tour; and the costs for each individual's attendance. [41539/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I did not attend the Ryder Cup, nor did any official of my Department do so in any official capacity.

Personal Injury Claims

194. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if consideration has been given to making it obligatory for plaintiffs in personal injury cases in the first instance to engage with the Personal Injuries Assessment Board prior to engaging in litigation; if consideration has been given to the significant financial and administrative burden on small and medium enterprises as a result of the increased number of personal injury claims; if consideration has been given to publishing anonymised amounts of all awards paid out by enterprises in personal injury cases; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40602/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Under the Personal Injuries Assessment Board Act 2003, all personal injury claims, with certain exceptions, such as medical negligence cases, must be submitted to the Personal Injuries Assessment Board (PIAB) unless they are settled by the parties involved at an early stage. The most recent figures (2017) published by PIAB do not show an increase in personal injuries claims going through PIAB. The full number of personal injuries claims in Ireland is not known, although PIAB publishes statistics which show aggregate information on claims it handles.

The Cost of Insurance Working Group, chaired by Minister D'Arcy, considered both the cost of claims and the personal injuries claims environment as part of their examination of the Employer Liability and Public Liability insurance sectors. This work culminated in the publication, on January 25th 2018, of the Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability

Insurance.

The Report makes 15 recommendations with 29 associated actions to be carried out, detailed in an Action Plan contained in the Report with agreed timelines for implementation.

The recommendations, covering three main themes, include actions to:

- Review the level of damages in personal injury cases: which includes a request that the Law Reform Commission undertake a detailed analysis of the possibility of developing constitutionally sound legislation to delimit or cap the amounts of damages which a court may award in respect of some or all categories of personal injuries;

- Improve the personal injuries litigation framework: through a number of measures, including:

- ensuring potential defendants are notified in sufficient time that an incident has occurred in relation to which a claim is going to be made against their policy;

- tackling fraudulent or exaggerated claims; and

- ensuring suitable training and information supports are available to the Judiciary to assist in the fair and consistent assessment and awarding of damages in personal injury cases, and

- Increase Transparency: which includes actions to enhance levels of transparency and improve data sharing and collection processes.

All 29 actions are scheduled to be implemented before the end of 2019, with 26 due for completion this year. The sixth Quarterly Progress Update on implementation was published in August and shows that in respect of the actions under this Report due for completion in the first half of the year, 14 of the 15 actions have been completed with the remaining one partially delayed.

The Working Group will continue to focus on implementing the recommendations of the Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance in parallel with implementing those from the 2017 Motor Report. It is hoped that the cumulative effects of the completion of the two Reports' recommendations, together with the implementation of the recommendations from the two reports of the Personal Injuries Commission, will include increased stability in the pricing of insurance for businesses as well as an improved personal injuries claims environment.

The importance of increasing transparency was identified as one of the three main themes of the recommendations of the Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance. In particular, the Deputy may wish to note the Working Group's recommendations for the Courts Service to publish the results of personal injury cases in a more granular fashion, to request the Central Statistics Office to consider the feasibility of collecting price information on the cost of insurance to business and for the Central Bank to examine the feasibility of adding employer liability and public liability insurance data to the National Claims Information Database.

Recruitment Agencies Regulation

195. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if foreign agencies recruiting staff abroad to work here are obliged under the regulations to have a licence to do so. [40584/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Employment Agency Act 1971 governs the sector operating in Ireland. Under the Act, an employment agency operating in Ireland must hold a licence to carry out its business. It is an offence under the Act for an employment agency to do so without a licence. An employment agency operating outside Ireland will be subject to regulation, if any, of the jurisdiction in which it is located.

The Workplace Relations Commission (WRC), on behalf of the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, deals with applications for employment agency licences. If an employment agency has a premises in the state, it must obtain a licence and, in order to obtain a licence, the premises must conform to the standards of accommodation prescribed by Regulations under the Employment Agency Act 1971 and the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work, Act 2005.

It is an offence for an employment agency to carry on business without an employment agency licence. Under section 10 (1) of the Employment Agency Act, 1971, as amended by section 19 of the Protection of Employees (Fixed-Term Work) Act 2003, a person guilty of an offence under the Act shall be liable on summary conviction to a Class C fine not exceeding €2,500 and in the case of a continuing offence to a further Class D fine not exceeding €1,000 a day.

IDA Ireland

196. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if the IDA requires a company to pay the living wage to staff as part of its conditions of giving that company grant aid; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40787/18]

198. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if the IDA requires a company not to have zero-hour contracts in place as part of its conditions of giving that company grant aid; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40789/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 196 and 198 together.

As part of the conditions of an employment grant from the IDA, an applicant company must create a certain number of permanent full-time positions. It should be noted, in this context, that the average annual salary of jobs in IDA Ireland client firms is currently €48,406, which evidences the high-quality of those positions.

In order to draw down grants from the Agency, the client company in question must meet the performance targets that are stipulated in the underlying contract between the firm and the IDA. Such contracts also provide that jobs supported by an IDA employment grant must remain in place for five years from the date of the last payment. If that is not the case, the client company is required to repay the grant on a pro rata basis for non-performance.

While the IDA's grant agreements do not contain specific reference to employment legislation, the Agency's client companies are of course required to adhere to the relevant legislation as is the case with all employers operating in the State.

Enterprise Ireland

197. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if Enterprise Ireland requires a company to pay the living wage to staff as part of its conditions of giving that company grant aid; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40788/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Enterprise Ireland does not require a company to pay the living wage to staff as part of its conditions of giving grants to companies. However, while the agency does not collect data relating to salaries paid at the individual level, data collected as part of its annual ABSEI survey shows that the average payroll per employee across the EI client base actually exceeds the living wage. It was €50,100 in 2017 which compares favourably to the national average annual earnings in 2017 which was €37,646, according to the Earnings and Labour Costs Annual Data published in June 2018. *Question No. 198 answered with Question No. 196.*

Enterprise Ireland

199. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if Enterprise Ireland requires a company not to have zero-hour contracts in place as part of its conditions of giving that company grant aid; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40790/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Enterprise Ireland does not support zero hour contracts due to the requirements set out under EU State Aid Rules and in line with the agency's policy. Under EU State Aid rules, Enterprise Ireland can only provide support against actual wage costs calculated over a two-year period. The jobs must be maintained in the SME for 3 years or in a large company for 5 years. In addition, under Enterprise Ireland policy, the supported salary costs must be above the minimum wage salary, applicable in Ireland, for the job to be eligible for support.

Work Permits Data

200. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of permits that will be issued under the proposed meat permit pilot scheme to address labour shortages in the meat processing sector; the nationalities of the employees to receive permits from this scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41034/18]

201. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if there is a list of the employers involved in the proposed pilot scheme to address labour shortages in the meat processing sector; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41038/18]

202. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if and when copies will be provided of the written statements from employers involved in the proposed pilot scheme containing the information outlined in section 3(1) of the Terms of Employment (Information) Act 1994; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41039/18]

203. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if she has met with the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection to discuss the matter of the proposed pilot scheme to address labour shortages in the meat processing sector; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41042/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I pro-

pose to take Questions Nos. 200 to 203, inclusive, together.

Ireland operates a managed employment permits system which maximises the benefits of economic migration while minimising the risk of disrupting Ireland's labour market. Current Government policy is to issue employment permits for the employment of non-EEA nationals for specific vacancies and where the positions on offer cannot be reasonably filled from within Ireland, Switzerland and the EEA.

Meetings took place at official level between my Department and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. I recently published the Interdepartmental Group (IDG) Report on the Review of Economic Migration Policy in which the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection played an active role. Membership of the IDG was drawn from senior officials of key Government Departments, including the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, who played a key role in reviewing all available evidence and data when considering the introduction of the pilot scheme to address labour shortages in the agri-food sector. In addition, my officials delivered a presentation on the pilot scheme at a stakeholder event hosted by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

During the review, I requested that the emerging labour shortages being experienced in the agri-sector be prioritised. As a result, a total of 750 employment permits for meat processing operatives have been made available under the pilot scheme. The pilot scheme is open to all employers working in the sector and workers can be drawn from almost all non-EEA countries. A list of all employers who have been provided with employment permits, and the nationalities of non-EEA nationals who have been issued permits, is available on the Employment Permits section of my Department's website.

The Terms of Employment (Information) Act, 1994, provides that an employer must issue its employees with a written statement of terms and conditions relating to their employment within two months of commencing employment. It also provides that an employer must notify the employee of any changes in the particulars as given in the statement.

The Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) has no record of any complaints received to date from employees involved in the pilot scheme stating that they have not received the information outlined in section 3(1) of the Act mentioned above. It is also worth noting that all applications for an employment permit must include a copy of the contract of employment signed by the employer and employee.

Ministerial Communications

204. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if there is a policy regarding ministerial use of private email for Government business in her Department; and if so, if it will be published. [41517/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): There is no specific policy in place regarding Ministerial use of private email for Government business in my Department. I can confirm however, that I do not use private emails for Department/Official business, and neither do my advisors.

Lansdowne Road Agreement Implementation

205. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health the measures he plans to

implement in order to assist a section 39 funded voluntary hospice (details supplied) in County Sligo in order to enable it to implement both the Lansdowne Road and public sector pay agreements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40594/18]

375. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health the pathway provided for full pay restoration in view of the fact that recent negotiations regarding the pay restoration of section 39 workers have concluded with reports of a deal being struck at the cost of €7.7 million; and the way in which the estimated cost of €68 million will be provided for in the coming years. [41195/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 205 and 375 together.

The Deputies 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. 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.

Services for People with Disabilities

206. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in processing an application by a person (details supplied) for an early intervention team in order to access educational supports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40729/18]

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

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

Services for People with Disabilities

207. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to increase the resources

to early intervention teams in order to cease the long delays for families seeking educational supports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40730/18]

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.

Budget 2019

208. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding a pre-budget submission; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41132/18]

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.

Budget 2019

209. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if budget requests from an organisation (details supplied) will be allocated in budget 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40588/18]

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

Departmental Agencies Funding

210. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health the amount of section 39 funding by county to an organisation (details supplied). [40589/18]

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.

Departmental Funding

211. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health the reason an organisation (details supplied) in respect of activities in County Meath receives no funding under section 39. [40590/18]

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

Primary Care Centres

212. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health the status of the primary care centre in Rialto, Dublin 8, in view of the collapse of a company (details supplied). [40592/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the HSE has responsibility for the provision, along with the maintenance and operation of Primary Care Centres and other Primary Care facilities, the Executive has been asked to reply directly to the Deputy.

National Educational Psychological Service Staff

213. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a psychologist for a school (details supplied); if a psychologist is in place; when the psychologist position became vacant; if it has been advertised; his plans to fill it in the near future; if there is a full-time school aged team psychologist based in Letterkenny, County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40597/18]

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.

In relation to the provision of psychology resources in school, this is a matter for the Department of Education and Skills.

Services for People with Disabilities

214. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if he or the HSE has reviewed an application for funding by a group (details supplied) for a multiple sclerosis care centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40598/18]

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.

Prescriptions Charges

215. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40601/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Medical card holders are required to pay a prescription charge of €2.00 per item for medicines and other prescription items supplied to them by community pharmacists under the General Medical Services scheme. This charge is subject to a monthly cap of €20 for each person or family.

Pharmacies are obliged by law to collect prescription charges on behalf of the HSE.

Any future changes to the prescription charge is a matter which I intend to consider in the context of the implementation of the health commitments in the Programme for Partnership Government, having regard to the funding available to facilitate such measures.

Services for People with Disabilities

216. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will have a consultation with an occupational guidance adviser further to commitments made that such a consultation would occur. [40603/18]

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.

Maternity Services

217. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of gynaecologists employed in Cavan General Hospital in each of the years 2013 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form. [40605/18]

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

Hospital Staff Data

218. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of consultant specialists and the title of each employed in Cavan General Hospital in each of the years 2013 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form. [40606/18]

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.

Nursing Staff Data

219. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of nurses employed in Cavan General Hospital in each of the years 2013 to 2017 and to date in 2018 in tabular form. [40607/18]

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.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

220. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to ensure that the drug Spinraza is made available to persons of spinal muscular atrophy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40610/18]

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

For a medicine to be considered for reimbursement by the HSE, it must first have a marketing authorisation from the European Medicines Agency (EMA) or the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA), before being assessed under the 2013 Act.

HSE decisions on which medicines are reimbursed by the taxpayer are made on objective, scientific and economic grounds, on the advice of the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE). The NCPE conducts health technology assessments (HTAs) for the HSE, and makes recommendations on reimbursement to assist HSE decisions.

The NCPE uses a decision framework to systematically assess whether a drug is cost-effective as a health intervention. This process ensures that only treatments that are clinical and cost effective are reimbursed.

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 indicated for the treatment of 5q spinal muscular atrophy (SMA), a disorder characterised by progressive muscle atrophy and weakness.

In May 2017, the EMA granted market authorisation for nusinersen and in October 2017,

the HSE received a reimbursement application for nusinersen.

In December 2017, the NCPE completed a HTA of nusinersen and did not recommend reimbursement at the price submitted. No decision has been arrived as yet on the application for the reimbursement of nusinersen as the statutory process is still on-going.

Pharmacy Regulations

221. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40614/18]

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.

Medical Qualifications

222. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the need for locum consultant post applicants, particularly within psychiatry, to hold specialist registra-

tion in the general division; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40617/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE Policy in respect of consultant appointments including psychiatry, both permanent and temporary, has a requirement that they are on the relevant Specialist Register. In March 2008, the HSE amended the qualifications specified for consultant posts to require registration in the relevant specialist division of the Register of Medical Practitioners at the Medical Council. The rationale for the change was the imperative to ensure that consultants employed in the public health system have the appropriate training, skills, competences and qualifications to deliver care as assessed by the Medical Council which has the statutory role of protecting the public by promoting the highest professional standards amongst doctors practising in the State. The Consultants' Contract 2008 reflects this requirement.

HSE HR Circular 021/2017 addressed in detail the qualifications required for consultant posts. The effect of this is that applicants who are not registered in the relevant specialist division cannot be appointed to a permanent consultant post in a HSE hospital or service or in a Section 38 agency funded by the HSE.

The HSE has advised however that there are circumstances where it has been required to continue to appoint doctors who were not on the Specialist Register to fill consultant posts that were vacant so that essential services could be delivered. A process is in place where the Hospital Groups provide an assurance to the appropriate National Service Director that the required relevant supervisory supports are in place for Consultants not on the Specialist Register.

Medicinal Products Availability

223. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if the drug niraparib will be made available to a person (details supplied) in view of the fact that they are platinum resistant and due to this were refused access to the drug by the compassionate access programme; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the drug is available in the UK and Europe for both sets of patients; and if the matter will be expedited. [40620/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for medicine pricing and reimbursement decisions, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. The Act specifies the criteria for decisions on the reimbursement of medicines. As Minister for Health, I do not have any statutory power or function in relation to the reimbursement of medicines. In addition, Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 precludes me from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

In line with the 2013 Act, if a company would like a medicine to be reimbursed by the HSE pursuant to the community drugs schemes, the company must first submit an application to the HSE to have the new medicine added to the reimbursement list.

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

HSE decisions on which medicines are reimbursed by the taxpayer are made on objective, scientific and economic grounds, on the advice of the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE). The NCPE conducts health technology assessments (HTAs) for the HSE and makes

recommendations on reimbursement to assist HSE decisions. The NCPE uses a decision framework to systematically assess whether a drug is cost-effective as a health intervention.

I have been informed that the NCPE completed a rapid review on Niraparib (Zejula) on 21 June 2018. They recommended that a full HTA be conducted to assess the clinical effectiveness and cost effectiveness of niraparib compared with the current standard of care. The HSE commissioned the HTA on 27 June 2018.

Hospital Appointments Status

224. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40629/18]

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.

Bullying in the Workplace

225. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the number of complaints in regard to bullying that have been submitted by nurses and midwives via the HSE's new complaints notification process created as part of the organisation's dignity at work policy since the notification system launched. [40630/18]

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

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

226. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health the plans in place in order to address the shortage of anaphylactic pens here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40634/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) has advised that it is aware of the global intermittent supply of certain adrenaline auto-injectors (AAIs) that has subsequently impacted the Irish market. The shortage of these products has caused increased demand for the other AAI ranges marketed in Ireland resulting in further supply disruptions.

The Medicine Shortages Framework was launched in September. It is a collaborative initiative that brings together key players in the health sector with the aim of developing strategies to mitigate the effect of shortages in Ireland so that patient health is protected. This new framework will result in a co-ordinated national response to managing medicine shortages and provides mechanisms that can be swiftly activated if a shortage of a particular medicine does occur. The framework strengthens and improves procedures which provide enhanced protection for patients through forward planning and shortage identification. It was developed after extensive consultation with a wide range of stakeholders involved in the provision of medicines, including state agencies, healthcare professionals, patient groups, and industry.

The HPRA provides the platform for, and facilitates the coordination of, all stakeholders to share information in order to prevent or mitigate the impact of medicine shortages when they occur. A medicine shortages list is being maintained on the HPRA website as part of this framework and is updated frequently as new information arises in relation to shortages of individual medicines.

Under this framework, the HPRA has been working closely with all suppliers of AAIs in Ireland to reduce the impact of supply disruptions on patients and healthcare professionals. As a result, while there remain limited supplies of certain AAIs, alternative AAIs are available.

Due to the general increased demand for AAIs at this time of year individual pharmacies may still be experiencing supply issues, but there are supplies within the system and more are expected in the coming weeks.

While the supply situation for individual AAIs is subject to change the HPRA will be maintaining regular contact with all AAI suppliers and other relevant stakeholders, including wholesalers and healthcare professionals (including the Irish Food Allergy Network).

Patients and their carers should familiarise themselves with any AAI that has been supplied to them, especially if it is one they have not received previously. If a patient has any questions relating to administration of an AAI, they should speak to their pharmacist or doctor.

Hospital Staff Data

227. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the number of consultant radiologists attached to University Hospital Waterford; the respective speciality applicable to each radiologist, for example, mammography, MRI and so on of each; his plans to increase the number employed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40639/18]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists Action Plans

228. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health his plans to reduce the outpatient waiting list for neurology at University Hospital Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40640/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Improving waiting times for hospital procedures and outpatient appointments is a key commitment in the Programme for Government.

In 2018, the HSE expects to deal with a total 3.3m out-patient attendances at an overall

ratio of new to return patients of 1:2.5. The HSE also advises that in 2017 almost half a million (479,000) outpatients did not attend their appointments. The establishment, earlier this year, of the central validation office in the National Treatment Purchase Fund is an important development in this regard.

My Department is engaging with the HSE and the NTPF to finalise an Outpatient Action Plan. This Plan will aim to reduce the growth in the number of patients waiting for outpatient services through improving the accuracy of the waiting list and trialling NTPF funded interventions, including weekend and out of hours clinics. NTPF has invited proposals from Hospital Groups and as of end of September had approved almost 12,700 outpatient appointments.

In relation to the specific query raised in relation to plans to reduce the neurology waiting list at University Hospital Waterford, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

229. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be called for a MRI scan at University Hospital Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40641/18]

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

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

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

Medical Card Administration

230. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the way in which applications for medical cards from persons with severe rheumatoid arthritis are considered in the context of their condition; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40647/18]

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.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

231. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay of 34 months in County Wexford for an appointment with a child and adolescent primary care psychologist; the further reason the service is taking no urgent appointments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40659/18]

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.

Home Help Service Provision

232. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the progress to date in the determination of an application for additional home support in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40660/18]

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.

Homeless Accommodation Provision

233. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of beds in homeless accommodation; if they are supported temporary accommodation, temporary emergency accommodation or other available specifically for homeless persons leaving hospital in each of the years 2015 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40667/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): As this is a

service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Mental Health Services

234. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the waiting times for accessing mental health supports in Dublin 5 (details supplied) is 16 weeks; the steps he is taking in order to address the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40669/18]

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

Mental Health Services

235. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the waiting times for an appointment in each of the mental health services in Dublin 5 (details supplied); the average time a patient will wait for an appointment in each of these facilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40670/18]

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.

Dental Services

236. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if changes will be brought forward to the Dentists Act 1985 which would allow dental hygienists to treat patients without the need for supervision by a dentist; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40697/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department is currently developing new legislation to replace the Dentists Act, 1985. The role and the regulation of dental hygienists is being examined in the context of this new legislation. The drafting of the scheme of the Bill has commenced, however it is at an early stage.

Dental Services Provision

237. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if a review will be carried out into the dental care provided to long-stay patients at nursing home facilities (details supplied); his plans to amend legislation in this area in order to provide a greater level of service by allowing dental hygienists to visit nursing homes independently; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40698/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): A new National Oral Health Policy is currently being finalised by my Department and I expect it will be published later this year. The Policy will replace the Dental Health Action Plan, published in 1994, and on which the provision of dental services in Ireland is currently based.

The aim of the policy is to develop a model of care that will enable preventative approaches to be prioritised, improve access, and support interventions appropriate to current and future oral health needs including those of long stay patients in nursing home facilities.

My Department is also currently developing new legislation to replace the Dentists Act 1985. The regulation and role of dental hygienists is being examined in the context of this new legislation. The drafting of the scheme of the Bill has commenced, however it is at an early stage.

Assisted Human Reproduction

238. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if zygotes stored in Irish or international clinics that are formed prior to the full commencement of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 but are still yet to be implanted will be covered in order that both the biological mother and their spouse will be recognised as legal parents; if not, his plans to include such scenarios in the assisted human reproduction Bill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40700/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): After commencement of Parts 2 & 3 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 the provisions of the Act are confined to procedures carried out in the State and where the child is born in the State. Transitional provisions relating to the use of embryos created prior to the commencement of Parts 2 & 3 of the Act are provided for in sub-section 26 (6) and sub-section 26 (8) of the Act. Sub-section 26 (8) allows for the use of an embryo in a donor-assisted human reproduction procedure that was formed before the date on which Part 3 of the Act comes into operation, subject to certain conditions. These conditions are that: the embryo was formed for the purpose of the donor-assisted human reproduction procedure; the donor of the gamete, used in the formation of the embryo, consented to the use of the gamete in a donor-assisted human reproduction procedure; and that each person who, at the time of the formation of the embryo, was an intending parent, has consented under section 9 or section 11 of the Act to be the parent of any child born as a result of the procedure in accordance with section 5 of the Act.

However, the transitional provisions only apply to a donor-assisted human reproduction procedure where the procedure is carried out in the State and where the child is born in the State.

Air Ambulance Service

239. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health if a helipad will be provided at Wexford General Hospital in view of the establishment of a service (details supplied) based in Mallow and covering an area including County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40704/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Engagement is ongoing between the National Ambulance Service and the Irish Community Rapid Response in relation to a proposed air ambulance service for the South and I await the submission of an agreed proposal.

I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly in relation to any plans to develop a helipad at Wexford General Hospital. I should however explain that a process is in place for the agreement and prioritisation of projects that are proposed for inclusion in the Capital Plan. Proposals must be considered in the context of the capital funding available and priority must be based on verified service needs. The HSE will continue to apply the available funding for capital devel-

opments in the most effective way possible to meet current and future needs.

Drug Treatment Programmes

240. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the measures being taken to address the rise in use of crack cocaine in view of the reported increase of this substance in recent years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40707/18]

301. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health his views on the impact of crack cocaine in Dublin; and the measures being put in place to help persons seek treatment. [40956/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): I propose to take Questions Nos. 240 and 301 together.

The most recently published data on drug prevalence show that current use of cocaine (including crack) has remained stable at 0.5 per cent for the past three national surveys (2006/2007, 2010/2011 and 2014/2015).

The HSE is responsible for the provision of addiction services, including treatment. The Health Research Board bulletin 'Drug Treatment in Ireland 2010 – 2016', reports that cocaine is the third most common main problem drug. Since 2014, there has been a steady increase in the proportion of new cases for treatment reporting cocaine as a main problem drug in Ireland, rising from a low of 297 cases in 2013 to 568 cases in 2016. In 2016, 11.3% (112) of cocaine cases reported crack as their main problem drug an increase from 9.1% (81) in 2010.

Strengthening early harm reduction responses to current and emerging trends of drug use, including cocaine and crack cocaine, is a key theme in the national drugs strategy, 'Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery'. In July 2018, I launched the national cocaine harm reduction campaign, which is a collaboration between the HSE and the Ana Liffey Drugs Project.

The aim of the campaign is to raise awareness of the dangers of taking cocaine (both powder and crack). This campaign will communicate the risks and dangers of cocaine use to dependent users and at-risk groups, as well as to those who engage in 'recreational use'. It is important to get the message out to the public about the risks associated with drugs like crack cocaine and highlight how these risks are hugely increased when combined with alcohol.

Addiction Treatment Services

241. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of detox beds available by county; the average length of time a person is waiting to access such a bed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40708/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Medicinal Products Availability

242. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health when the diet supplement

Kuvan will be available to late treated adults with PKU; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40711/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Service Executive (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. The 2013 Act does not give the Minister for Health any powers in this regard. The HSE does not require approval or consent from the Minister or Government when making a reimbursement decision.

This process ensures that treatments that are clinical and cost effective are reimbursed. In circumstances where a company has failed to demonstrate the clinical benefit to support the price that they are seeking for their treatment, the HSE reaches a decision not to reimburse the medicine.

Kuvan (sapropterin) is a medicinal product for the treatment of phenylketonuria (PKU) and treatment once initiated would be expected to be lifelong.

The National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics completed a health technology assessment of sapropterin on the 15th September 2017 and they did not recommend reimbursement as it was not deemed cost effective.

The application was considered in detail by the HSE Drugs Group in January 2018 and referred to the Rare Diseases Technology Review Committee for more detailed consideration and consultation with expert clinicians and patients' groups.

The Rare Diseases Technology Review Committee is responsible for:

1. Reviewing proposals received from industry or expert groups in Ireland for funding of new products for rare diseases, or expanded indications for existing products for rare diseases and making recommendations as to the implementation of the relevant recommendations from the National Rare Diseases Plan 2011-2018; and

2. Providing contributions to the development of clinical guidelines for relevant Orphan Medicinal Products (OMPs) and supporting the implementation of guidelines in conjunction with the National Drugs Management Programme Office where applicable.

The Committee's recommendations for reimbursement of OMPs are not intended to replace any part of the existing medicines appraisal or reimbursement process.

The HSE Leadership are scheduled to meet in October and will deliberate on the recommendations received from the Rare Diseases Technology Review Committee in relation to sapropterin.

Reimbursement of sapropterin will be considered in line with the 2013 Act.

Mental Health Services Staff

243. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the lack of trained psychiatrists in the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital metabolic unit and the HSE mental health services for late treated adults with PKU; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40712/18]

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 to you directly, as soon as possible.

Health Services Staff

244. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health his plans for an increase in funding for a community based podiatrist for persons with diabetes in County Sligo (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40716/18]

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

Hospital Appointments Delays

245. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40719/18]

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

246. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health his plans to upgrade the HSE facilities at Erkina House, Rathdowney, County Laois. [40720/18]

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 Transfers

247. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to plans to transfer the patients of Erkina House, Rathdowney, County Laois to other facilities; and the consultation that has taken place with the patients or their families. [40721/18]

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

National Dementia Strategy Implementation

248. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the community supports for persons with dementia here; his plans to expand the support levels for persons with dementia; his further plans to meet dementia advocacy groups to discuss increases in funding in the context of budget 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40722/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The National Dementia Strategy was launched in December 2014 to meet the challenges faced by the 55,000 people living with dementia in Ireland and to provide services to meet growing demand in future years. The Strategy contains 35 priority and additional actions and its implementation is being led by the National Dementia Office in the HSE. The office has made substantial progress towards developing evidence-based care pathways for people with dementia and progress to date, as well as future plans, is recorded in the mid-term review of the Strategy's implementation, which was published in May this year. The Strategy emphasises the need for a "whole community response" to dementia, as the majority of people with dementia live in their own communities and wish to avail of services in their local area.

In 2016 and 2017, the National Dementia Office partnered with the Alzheimer Society of Ireland on a project to map dementia-specific community-based services and supports. The project showed that the average number of community-based services in each Community Health Organisation was 35. Services provided in the community include dementia day care centres, a large proportion of which operate five days a week; dementia-specific homecare delivered by fully trained staff who are familiar with and understand the different symptoms and stages of dementia; dementia-friendly activities such as choirs and art gallery visits; dementia social clubs and Alzheimer Cafés; carer support groups; and dementia advisers. These services are provided by voluntary organisations and the HSE and partner organisations.

It is acknowledged that there are gaps in access to services and a large variance in what services are provided across the country. The National Dementia Office has met with senior HSE officials in each Community Healthcare Organisation region to highlight gaps in each area and to develop local action plans to improve service provision.

In addition to these community supports, in 2014 the HSE introduced Dementia-Specific Intensive Homecare Packages (Dementia-IHCPs) to test the feasibility of providing a high level of support to people with dementia with complex needs to facilitate them to remain living at home. These were initially co-funded by the HSE and the Atlantic Philanthropies and now fully funded by the HSE, which has committed to continue to provide approximately 120 packages at any one time. In addition to the IHCPs, people with dementia are also able to avail of standard home care services on the basis of need and within the resources available

The Department of Health secured €6.26 million through the 2016, 2017 and 2018 Dormant Accounts Fund Action Plans for a number of projects to improve care and supports for people with dementia. Projects receiving funding include the delivery of post-diagnostic supports; a dementia diagnostic service for people with intellectual disability; a national network of memory technology resource rooms; the development of a national dementia registry; the national rollout of a dementia training programme for HSE homecare staff; the development of dementia resource centres; funding for a dementia community activation coordinator; and community

support projects for people with dementia.

In terms of plans to expand support levels for people with dementia, the level of funding available for the Department of Health in 2019 and the quantum of services to be provided by the HSE will be considered as part of the national Estimates and budgetary process and National Service Planning.

In July and September, I met with the Alzheimer Society of Ireland to discuss dementia priorities. I have also met with Senator Colette Kelleher, a former CEO of the ASI and advocate for people with dementia, to specifically discuss the needs of people with dementia. I remain willing to engage with advocacy groups on dementia issues as we continue to work towards improved care pathways and services for people with dementia, their carers and families.

Services for People with Disabilities

249. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if he has met with a group (details supplied) to discuss funding arrangements for a centre in order for it to open on more weeks per year; if the granting of funds has been considered in the context of budget 2019; if the attention of the group has been drawn to other funding avenues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40725/18]

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

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

Medicinal Products

250. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the case of a person (details supplied) to whom medicinal cannabis has been recommended here and in another EU state as being beneficial but which practitioners here are refusing to prescribe due to potential liability; and if, in such cases it is possible to have the drug prescribed in another EU state. [40741/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Department is not in a position to advise or comment on individual cases.

Medical practitioners and patients may consult the Department of Health website which contains information on medical cannabis, including clinical guidance on the use of medical cannabis and details on how a medical practitioner may apply for a Ministerial licence for medical cannabis. This information can be found at the following website: health.gov.ie/blog/publications/cannabis-for-medical-use/ It is important to note that the decision to prescribe or not prescribe any treatment, including cannabis treatment, for an individual patient is strictly a decision for the treating clinician, in consultation with their patient. The Minister for Health has no role in this clinical decision-making process.

Under the Misuse of Drugs Acts 1977 to 2016, and the Regulations made thereunder, it is an offence to cultivate, import, export, produce, supply and possess cannabis except in accordance with a licence issued by the Minister for Health.

Medicinal Products

251. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health the progress being made to deal with the difficulties in having medicinal cannabis prescribed for patients in cases in which this is recommended; if the matter will be discussed with the Medical Council; and his plans to introduce legislation in order to resolve the matter. [40742/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Deputy may already be aware already that under the Misuse of Drugs legal framework, it is open to a medical practitioner to apply for a Ministerial licence for medical cannabis for the treatment of a patient under his or her care.

I would strongly advise that the Deputy and any persons interested in the use of cannabis for medical purposes to consult the Department of Health website which contains detailed information on the matter, including information on the types of cannabis products and the specified medical conditions for which they may be used to treat, as well as clinical guidance on its use. This information can be found at the following website address:

health.gov.ie/blog/publications/cannabis-for-medical-use.

Details of who may apply for a Ministerial licence and how to apply can also be found on this section of the Department's website at: health.gov.ie.

Having consulted the website, patients, healthcare professionals or others who require further details or clarifications are invited to contact my Department directly for further assistance.

Health Services Funding

252. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to a recent survey regarding whether funding for extra community based podiatrists in County Kildare to support the diabetes community will be made available in the context of budget 2019; if his attention has been further drawn to the year on year increase in the number of persons with diabetes that underwent a lower limb amputation in 2017 in County Kildare; his plans to address this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40750/18]

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.

Ministerial Meetings

253. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the reason he has been unable to meet with the family of a person (details supplied). [40754/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I would wish to assure the Deputy that my office has been in regular correspondence with the person concerned in order to attempt to arrange a meeting. Unfortunately, it has not yet proved possible to set a date, however I can confirm that I remain committed to doing so at the earliest possible opportunity.

HSE Reports

254. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the progress being made on implementing the recommendations of the HSE report 51449 (details supplied). [40755/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter I have referred the Deputy's question to the HSE and asked them to respond directly to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Status

255. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive a hospital appointment. [40763/18]

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

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

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

Hospital Beds Data

256. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of inpatient and day case public patient beds in each public and voluntary hospital in tabular form. [40764/18]

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.

Cross-Border Health Initiatives

257. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health the evidence required for the cross-border healthcare directive to prove a person is on a public waiting list here. [40765/18]

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

Home Care Packages Provision

258. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Health when a homecare package will be expedited for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[40770/18]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

259. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will secure an appointment to see an ENT specialist at the Royal College of Surgeons. [40776/18]

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

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

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

Home Help Service Provision

260. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health when 15 hours of home support will be provided for a person (details supplied). [40778/18]

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

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

Health Services Provision

261. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) can receive treatment in University Hospital Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40779/18]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

262. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be scheduled for surgery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40786/18]

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.

Cannabis for Medicinal Use

263. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health if the medical cannabis expert reference group has concluded its report on guidelines for the proposed medical cannabis access programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40792/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Considerable progress is being made in relation to the Cannabis for Medical Use Access Programme. The Deputy will be aware that an Expert Group has drawn up clinical guidance for healthcare professionals treating patients through the Access Programme.

These clinical guidelines have been published on the Department of Health's website, as part of a comprehensive repository of information on cannabis for medical use; including information on the licence application process, the planned access programme, the different types of cannabis products and the specified medical conditions they may be used to treat, as well as clinical guidance on its use. This information can be found at the following website address:

health.gov.ie/blog/publications/cannabis-for-medical-use.

Vaccination Programme

264. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding the HPV vaccine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40793/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Service Executive is committed

to providing accurate information for parents about diseases, the vaccines to prevent them and side effects to allow them to choose whether to give consent to vaccination. All the information provided to parents about vaccination is prepared from the available licensed documentation for each vaccine, the Summary of Products Characteristics (SPC) and Patient Information Leaflet (PIL).

As this PQ refers to a service issue, I have referred it to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Services

265. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health if all blood samples that are taken in sexual assault treatment units after a rape has occurred are tested for date rape drugs; his plans to fund and run a pilot study in which all blood samples taken in sexual assault treatment units to identify the size of this problem and its trend; his further plans to make the spiking of drinks in such a manner a criminal offence and raising the profile of same; if the number of locations at which men and women can access these blood tests will be increased; the funding and staffing levels of each sexual assault treatment unit in each of the past ten years; and his plans to ensure that all sexual assault treatment units have the necessary staff levels to be open when necessary 24 hours a day and 7 days a week unlike the Dublin unit. [40794/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Deputy's question deals mainly with service-level and operational components of SATU, therefore his question has been referred to the HSE who will respond to these queries directly. The Minister has directed the department to undertake a policy review of national SATU services to assess the efficacy of health policy in the area, including the current staffing model, access, and governance. The review is ongoing and is expected to conclude by the end of 2018.

Bereavement Counselling Services Provision

266. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Health his plans to extend bereavement counselling services for children under 18 years of age that have been affected by the sudden death of a parent. [40834/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I understand from the HSE that TUSLA, the Child and Family Agency, has responsibility for bereavement counselling services for children under 18 years of age that have been affected by the sudden death of a parent. As such, the Deputy may wish to put this question to my colleague, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, as TUSLA falls under the aegis of her Department.

Question No. 267 withdrawn.

Cancer Screening Programmes

268. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the status of the supplementary report into the CervicalCheck screening programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40838/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): On 12 September 2018, the Report of the Scoping Inquiry into the CervicalCheck Screening Programme, led by Dr Gabriel Scally, was

published following a Government decision. Government has accepted all 50 recommendations set out in the Report.

The Report is unequivocal in stating that the widespread non-disclosure of the results of historical screening audits was a substantial breach of trust for the women and families concerned. It caused significant distress and additional suffering to those affected.

However, Dr Scally is clear in his report that the Inquiry is satisfied with the quality management processes in the labs contracted by CervicalCheck. His report presents no evidence that the rates of discordant smear reporting or the performance of the programme fell below what is expected in a cervical screening programme.

Crucially, he has confirmed that he finds no reason why the existing contracts for laboratory services should not continue until the new HPV regime is introduced. This is very welcome reassurance for women in Ireland and very welcome also given the importance of screening for women's health.

The report highlights issues with accreditation of some of the laboratories used in the past for CervicalCheck work. In light of this, Dr Scally has undertaken to do further work, on which he will provide a supplementary report to the Minister.

Cancer Screening Programmes

269. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the status of the roll-out of the HPV test; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40839/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I approved the switch to HPV testing as the primary screening mechanism for the CervicalCheck programme in February 2018, with cytology as a reflex test. This will involve a reconfiguration of the laboratory work involved and will be subject to a tendering process for any work carried out outside the public sector. The HSE have advised that detailed capacity planning is ongoing, and a project steering group comprising all key stakeholders is in place.

The introduction of the HPV test as the primary screening test is a key priority, which will significantly improve the accuracy of the screening process. My Department is engaging with the HSE to ensure that implementation of the switch to HPV testing progresses as quickly as possible.

HSE Staff Responsibilities

270. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health his views on the performance achievement policy for the Health Service Executive; if he is satisfied that full compliance with the policy has been achieved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40840/18]

314. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health his views on the performance achievement policy of the Health Service Executive; if he is satisfied that full compliance with the policy has been achieved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40997/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 270 and 314 together.

Paragraph 2.7.2 of the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018 to 2020 provides that ap-

propriate performance management systems must be fully implemented in public service sectors by 1 January 2019.

It is my understanding that the HSE and the staff representatives are currently engaging on the implementation of a HSE performance achievement policy.

HSE Reports

271. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the status of implementing the recommendations of the 2017 external report on the national screening service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40841/18]

315. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the status of implementing the recommendations of the 2017 external report on the National Screening Service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40998/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 271 and 315 together.

I understand that the report to which the Deputy refers was commissioned by the HSE and that its recommendations are under consideration by them. Accordingly, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy on this matter.

Treatment Abroad Scheme

272. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the outsourcing contracts in place regarding hospitals (details supplied). [40844/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Last year, the HSE published the Scoliosis Waiting List Update and Service Development Plan, which addressed treatment of children requiring corrective surgery for Scoliosis.

The approach set out in the Plan included insourcing of surgical procedures in the Children's Hospital Group (CHG) and the broader public hospital sector, as well as outsourcing initiatives, including private providers nationally and abroad. As part of the outsourcing initiative in 2017, two hospitals in the UK and two in Europe were engaged to undertake spinal fusion surgery.

In relation to outsourcing contracts in place at CHG, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Treatment Abroad Scheme

273. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the reason only one child has been forwarded for treatment abroad by the HSE during 2018 even though four month targets have not been met and some children have been left waiting so long for their surgery that they have been deemed not to be clinically fit to have surgery. [40845/18]

277. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health if children (details supplied) are now discharged from their HSE orthopaedic specialist consultant here; and the person that will routinely follow-up these patients. [40849/18]

278. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the cost in regard to the tendering process of the outsourcing contracts for scoliosis surgeries during 2017 (details supplied); the other costs that were incurred during this process, that is, renegotiation of contracts, including additional post-op follow-up of children in the UK and Germany and the costs of a French contract that was never utilised. [40850/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 273, 277 and 278 together.

Last year, the HSE published the Scoliosis Waiting List Update and Service Development Plan, which addressed treatment for children requiring corrective surgery for scoliosis. The approach set out in the Plan included insourcing of surgical procedures in the Children's Hospital Group (CHG), and the broader public hospital sector, as well as outsourcing initiatives, including private providers nationally and abroad.

In 2017, as part of the outsourcing initiative, families were offered the opportunity to have their child's surgery abroad. CHG advise that in total as part of this initiative 28 patients have had their treatment abroad and that arrangements have been agreed with services in the UK to undertake follow up reviews to ensure those children who received outsourced surgery in the UK receive appropriate follow up care as per the agreed protocol. This will include face to face outpatient clinics in Our Lady's Children's Hospital Crumlin, in addition to phone call and Skype follow up, if needed. These reviews are scheduled according to the patient's clinical care plan.

As a result of the additional €9m provided to the HSE in Budget 2018, the CHG advise that the increased investment has started to see the service stabilise and the current capacity expand to meet the demand for timely scoliosis treatment. As a consequence, there has not been the demand to send patients abroad for surgery.

Notwithstanding, this year a small number of families were offered the opportunity to have their child's surgery abroad, but did not avail of the offer as they did not want to travel abroad. One child did have surgery abroad in 2018; this was a procedure that was due to have taken place in 2017, but which was deferred until 2018.

The CHG advise that the investment in paediatric orthopaedics this year, which includes scoliosis services, has already improved access for surgery and outpatient review. The impact of investment is now starting to deliver results, with a consistent reduction in waiting times being recorded. By September 2018 there had been a reduction of 26% in the waiting times experienced to access surgery since the start of the year. This year the CHG aims to deliver 447 procedures, compared to 371 in 2017, and 224 in 2016.

The CHG advise that details of the costs associated with outsourcing are subject to confidentiality that applies to the procurement process with regard to information supplied by bidders, including costs. The same policy also applies to follow-on costs.

Hospital Waiting Lists

274. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the reason such a large proportion of children who are clinically listed for spinal surgery have been moved to a suspended category of wait list. [40846/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am sorry that any child and their family experience a long waiting time for treatment for scoliosis.

However, the Children's Hospital Group have advised that the clinical criteria for determining a care plan for scoliosis related surgeries and other spinal procedures is complex and is based on established clinical guidelines and best practice both nationally and internationally.

For some children who have additional problems which may require multidisciplinary team management, their treatment plan often requires extensive discussions so that the appropriate surgery can be scheduled in a timely manner. Some children may require a number of investigations or small procedures prior to a decision being made about definitive surgery. This plan is communicated to the patient's family.

The Children's Hospital Group advise that all suspensions of scoliosis patients are managed in line with NTPF guidelines. Patients in the suspended category are those that are not clinically ready for surgery therefore at a point in time. There is a plan in Our Lady's Children's Hospital Crumlin to progress a clinical case management system to categorise and manage those patients who do not need to be on a waiting list.

The CHG advise that at the end of September there were 24 patients on the suspended list at Our Lady's Children's Hospital Crumlin and in reviewing these patients there appears to be a number of patients who will be clinically deemed as not requiring surgery in 2018. These patients will be managed via the clinical case management system in the coming weeks in order to ensure that a safe, quality system is in place to support clinical decisions and case management.

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

275. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the wait time for a first scoliosis assessment with a specialist surgeon hospital (details supplied). [40847/18]

276. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the average wait time for spinal surgery once a child has been placed on a surgery list in hospitals (details supplied). [40848/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 275 and 276 together.

The Children's Hospital Group advise that Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin currently have 247 patients that have been referred to OPD for review under the category of scoliosis or spinal review. Of these 247 patients 62 have an appointment date and 185 patients do not, 96 patients are waiting over 6 months. Temple Street Children's University Hospital currently have 37 patients waiting for a first time OPD consultation, which are query spinal/ scoliosis. All referrals are clinically triaged by consultants and patients are assigned clinical indicative dates upon triage. There are currently 12 patients waiting over 6 months. Each of these patients have an clinical indicative date assigned (less than one year from time of referral)

In relation to the average wait times for spinal surgery, I have asked CHG to provide me with this information, and will provide it to the Deputy when it becomes available.

Question No. 277 and 278 answered with Question No. 273.

Hospital Waiting Lists

279. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health if the Children's Hospital Group, CHG, is actively following national protocols as per the National Treatment Purchase

Fund, NTPF; and the person or body that oversees the wait lists in the CHG and ensures compliance to national NTPF protocols in regard to the national wait lists for scoliosis. [40851/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) is responsible for collecting and validating all waiting lists for public hospitals.

As part of its statutory responsibilities the NTPF has also developed the National Waiting List Management Protocol, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures 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 Protocol, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists. Furthermore, the NTPF also undertakes an annual audit programme of public hospitals to ensure compliance with the waiting list protocol.

The Children's Hospital Group (CHG) advise that all suspensions are managed in line with NTPF guidelines. Scoliosis patients in the suspended category are those that are not clinically ready for surgery. There is a plan in Our Lady's Children's Hospital Crumlin to progress a clinical case management system to categorise and manage those patients who do not need to be on a waiting list.

The CHG advise that at the end of September there were 24 patients on the suspended list at Our Lady's Children's Hospital Crumlin and in reviewing these patients there appears to be a number of patients who will be clinically deemed as not requiring surgery in 2018. These patients will be managed via the clinical case management system in the coming weeks in order to ensure that a safe, quality system is in place to support clinical decisions and case management.

Services for People with Disabilities

280. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the wait time for HSE funding approval for bracing therapy if a child has a medical card; the reason children across the Children's Hospital Group, CHG, do not have equal access to bracing therapy and funding; and the further reason funding often depends on the hospital the child attends and whether or not they have a medical card. [40852/18]

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

Home Help Service Data

281. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the number of home help hours assigned in County Kerry for the month of September 2018, in tabular form; the number of hours provided in each month by HSE home help and private company staff, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40853/18]

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

Mental Health Services Data

282. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of approved CAMHS consultant psychiatrist posts per local area in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40854/18]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

283. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) was placed on the public waiting list for surgery. [40855/18]

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

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

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

Long-Term Illness Scheme Eligibility

284. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if a cost-benefit analysis has been undertaken in respect of the provision of the FreeStyle Libre monitoring system for all persons with type 1 diabetes on the long-term illness scheme; his plans to extend the scheme to all type 1 diabetes patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40856/18]

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

Organ Donation

285. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health his views on introducing an opt-out clause for organ donors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40858/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The General Scheme of a Human Tissue Bill is being finalised at present and will be submitted to Government for approval shortly. The proposed legislation will include provisions for a soft opt-out organ donation system.

Hospital Appointments Status

286. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health when a person (detail supplied) who is on the waiting list for three years will have hip surgery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40862/18]

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

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

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

Mental Health Services Staff

287. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the recommended number of early intervention and prevention counsellor posts in each CHO area; the level of vacancies in these posts; and the detail of counsellor numbers employed between the HSE and section 38 agencies. [40867/18]

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

288. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the action which can be taken to ensure legal costs are returned to staff cleared of wrongdoing at a facility (details supplied) which provides services to adults with intellectual disabilities. [40876/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I have agreed with the Deputy that further information is required in relation to this Parliamentary Question.

Emergency Departments Services

289. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health if the construction and staffing of the 60-bed unit University Hospital Limerick (details supplied) will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40878/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As Minister for Health, I am committed to continuing the effort to address overcrowding in our EDs, and in particular, improving the ca-

pacity of the system to respond during periods of peak demand.

My Department has engaged with the HSE this year to identify the location and mix of beds across the hospital system, which can be opened and staffed this year and into 2019 in order to improve preparedness for Winter 2018/2019.

The proposal from the HSE to increase acute and community bed capacity, which identifies 609 acute beds and 290 residential care beds to be phased in between 2018 and 2020, includes 60 additional in-patient beds in Limerick University Hospital to be delivered through a modular build programme.

The funding of this proposal is under consideration in the context of the 2019 estimates process.

Home Care Packages Funding

290. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full-year cost of providing 5,000 extra home care packages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40880/18]

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 Services

291. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the waiting time for X-rays to be read and advised to the referring general practitioner by hospital; and his views on the unacceptable wait of weeks before the result is advised in so many cases. [40885/18]

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.

Medical Consent

292. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 156 to 158, inclusive, of 26 September 2018, if Defence Forces medical officers are excluded from the legal obligation to obtain consent prior from their patients prior to a medical investigation, examination or treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40893/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Defence Forces medical officers who are medical practitioners must hold full registration with the Medical Council and are therefore not exempt from the Medical Council's Guide to Professional Conduct and Ethics. This states at section 9.2 "You must make sure that patients have given their consent before you provide any medical investigation, examination or treatment. Consent is required by law and is an essential part of respect for patients' autonomy. Patients have the right to decide what happens to their own body."

Hospital Appointments Delays

293. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) is waiting so long for an appointment in the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40895/18]

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.

Cross-Border Health Services Provision

294. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the reason persons on the public waiting list here are being excluded from the cross-border scheme due to the fact an element of their income is an English pension (details supplied). [40918/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Cross Border Directive it is a person's Member State of affiliation which is responsible for the reimbursing of treatment accessed and not the Member State in which they reside.

A person's Member State of affiliation is the State in which the person is, or has been, an insured person within the meaning of Article 2 of EU Regulation 883/2004. A person who has worked and paid their social insurance contributions in one Member State may choose to live in another Member State. However, the State to which they are affiliated remains responsible for reimbursing them for the purposes of the Cross Border Directive. Thus if a person is in receipt of a contributory pension, however small, from another Member State, it is that State and not Ireland which is responsible for reimbursing a person under the terms of the Cross Border Directive.

As the particular details of any case to which the Deputy is referring is a service matter, this question has also been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Cross-Border Health Services Provision

295. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the reason administrative staff are changing the code of procedures carried out under the cross-border scheme which is resulting in patients only recovering a percentage of the money they paid (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40919/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Cross Border Directive (CBD) public patients in Ireland can seek to be referred to another EU/EEA country for a treatment

that is available in Ireland. The patient pays for the treatment and claims reimbursement from the HSE at the cost of that treatment in Ireland or the cost of it abroad, whichever is the lesser.

It is important to note that reimbursement is confined to the costs of the care itself and that the rates of reimbursement cannot exceed the cost of the provision of the care if it were provided in the Irish public health service.

The HSE has an obligation to check and verify the details of any payments it makes including applications for reimbursement under the Directive. In carrying out due diligence on applications for reimbursement under the Directive the HSE may examine the details of the treatment received to ensure that the treatment claimed for, and the clinical details of the treatment supplied on the application, are consistent with the procedure code which has been supplied. If there is a discrepancy the HSE will query the details in the application and this may lead to an adjustment of the reimbursement based the details of the treatment received.

Health Services Data

296. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the full year cost of recruiting an extra 70 mental health intellectual disability posts for children. [40926/18]

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 with the Deputy as soon as possible.

Cancer Screening Programmes

297. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 165, 166 and 171 of 26 September 2018, if he will answer the specific questions (details supplied) contained in the original questions which to date his reply did not answer. [40928/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As outlined in previous Parliamentary Questions to the Deputy, screening tests are a balance of sensitivity and specificity and therefore include both false negative and false positive results which could affect the screening outcome and treatment of a person who may or who may not have a disease. It would be expected that they would have occurred in all labs contracted by CervicalCheck since its inception. I again emphasise that false positives and false negatives are unavoidable and happen in every screening programme.

The Deputy has asked about the qualifications of screeners employed by laboratories outside of this country which provide services to CervicalCheck, and about a risk assessment in relation to the potential use of another laboratory. These are matters which directly relate to the quality of services provided by contracted laboratories.

The Scoping Inquiry, led by Dr.. Gabriel Scally, reported in September. Its terms of reference, developed following cross-party engagement, included examination of the tendering, contracting, operation, conflict of interest arrangements, performance information and performance management, accreditation and quality assurance of contracted cytology laboratory services since the inception of the CervicalCheck programme. Dr. Scally's report was the result of a period of intensive work which included visits to the contracted laboratories.

Dr. Scally is clear in his report that the Inquiry is satisfied with the quality management processes in the laboratories contracted by CervicalCheck. All of the laboratories visited by the

Scoping Inquiry are meeting the regulatory requirements current in their own country. Crucially, he has confirmed that there is no reason, on quality grounds, why the existing contracts for laboratory services should not continue until the new HPV testing regime has been introduced. This provides welcome reassurance for women in Ireland about the quality of these services.

Dr. Scally has undertaken to carry out a supplementary report into certain further aspects of the laboratories, including accreditation. He has also made a number of key recommendations in relation to laboratory services which I intend to implement and which will help to ensure that the cervical screening programme meets the highest possible standards.

Health Services Provision

298. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if the case of a person (details supplied) will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40946/18]

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.

General Practitioner Data

299. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of new general practitioners required over the next five years to provide for the replacement of general practitioners retiring over the same period; the number that will be required for replacing retiring rural general practitioners by the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40951/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): General Practitioners play an important role in the primary care system. The number of GPs on the specialist register continues to increase – up from 2,270 in 2010 to 3,670 as of July 2018 and there are now 2,508 GPs contracted by the HSE under the GMS scheme compared to 2,098 in 2008. It should be noted that as at 1 September 2018 there were only 24 GMS panels that do not have a permanent GP in place – a vacancy rate of less than 1%.

Over the past 6 years, an average of 143 GPs per year entered the GMS scheme compared with an average of 111 GPs per year exiting the scheme for the same period. During 2016 and 2017, an average of 158 GPs per year entered the GMS Scheme compared with an average of 132 GPs per year exiting the scheme for the same period.

I would like to assure the Deputy of the Government's commitment to the continued development of GP capacity to ensure that patients across the country continue to have access to GP services and that general practice is sustainable in all areas into the future. I want to ensure that existing GP services are retained and that general practice remains an attractive career option for newly-qualified GPs.

The Government is aware of the manpower issues facing general practice and has taken steps to increase the number of GP training places. In 2009, there were 120 General Practice training places available and in 2018 193 training places were filled, an increase of around 60% over this nine year period. The Government is committed to achieving further increases in GP training places in future years, and ensuring that all places are filled, in order to meet the future manpower needs of general practice.

Further efforts undertaken in recent years to increase the number of practising GPs in-

clude changes to the entry provisions to the GMS scheme to accommodate more flexible/shared GMS/GP contracts, and to the retirement provisions for GPs under the GMS scheme, allowing GPs to hold GMS contracts until their 72nd birthday, as well as the introduction of an enhanced supports package for rural GP practices.

The Government is also committed to engaging with GP representatives on the development of a package of measures and reforms to modernise the current GMS contract. Agreement on the delivery of service improvements and contractual reform has the potential to facilitate a substantial increase in the resourcing of general practice on a multiannual basis.

Cancer Screening Programmes

300. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the efforts being made to reduce waiting times of circa 17 weeks for women participating in smear tests in circumstances in which they have been advised of abnormalities and have had issues with tests previously; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40954/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Following a Government decision on 1 May, I asked CervicalCheck to make the necessary arrangements to provide that any woman who has had a CervicalCheck smear test, and whose GP considers that they should have a further test, to access such a further test without charge. CervicalCheck laboratory activity has thus been significantly above normal levels. This is a result both of out-of-cycle smears and increased uptake generally. This has impacted turnaround times for results of smear tests.

The HSE has advised that every effort is being made to ensure that tests are processed as quickly as possible, having regard to the high standards required for testing. In relation to the specific query made, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy in this regard.

Question No. 301 answered with Question No. 240.

Services for People with Disabilities

302. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if a care centre (details supplied) will be opened for 52 weeks a year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40957/18]

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.

Transport Support Scheme

303. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the intro-

duction of the new transport support scheme to replace the mobility allowance; the timeframe for the provision of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40960/18]

350. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the introduction of the new transport support scheme to replace the mobility allowance; the timeframe for the provision of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41151/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 303 and 350 together.

The Deputy will be familiar with the background to the closure of both the Mobility Allowance and Motorised Transport Grant schemes in February 2013.

My colleague, the Minister for Health and I brought a Memorandum to Government on proposals for a new Transport Support Payment Scheme towards the end of the last Dáil session. Following consideration of the matter, it was decided to withdraw the Memorandum from the Cabinet Agenda at the time. A new Transport Support Payment Scheme remains a priority and we intend to revert to Government with revised proposals to reflect the discussions at that Cabinet meeting and further discussions between ourselves, in due course.

With regard to the Motorised Transport Grant, this scheme operated as a means-tested grant to assist persons with severe disabilities with the purchase or adaptation of a car, where that car was essential to retain employment. The maximum Motorised Transport Grant, which was payable once in any three-year period, was €5,020. Following closure of the scheme in February 2013, no further Motorised Transport Grants have been payable.

It is important to note that the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers scheme operated by the Revenue Commissioners, remains in place. This scheme provides VRT and VAT relief, an exemption from road tax and a fuel grant to drivers and passengers with a disability, who qualify under the relevant criteria set out in governing regulations made by the Minister for Finance. Specifically adapted vehicles driven by persons with a disability are also exempt from payment of tolls on national roads and toll bridges. Transport Infrastructure Ireland has responsibility for this particular scheme.

There are improvements in access to a range of transport support schemes available to persons with disabilities in the State and on-going work is being carried out by Government Departments, agencies and transport providers to further improve access to public transport services. Under the National Disability Inclusion Strategy, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport has responsibility for the continued development of accessibility and availability of public transport for people with a disability.

Hospital Procedures

304. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if a surgical procedure will be expedited for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40961/18]

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

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing sched-

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

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

Hospital Beds Data

305. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of additional beds to be provided in modular units in 2018 for each relevant acute hospital in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40962/18]

306. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of additional beds provided in each relevant acute hospital to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40963/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 305 and 306 together.

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

National Treatment Purchase Fund Data

307. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the detail of the allocation of €55 million in 2018 to fund the National Treatment Purchase Fund to address waiting lists for those on same; the amount of this funding which has been spent; the number of patients that have been treated under the fund to date in 2018; and the number that have been treated since the restoration of the fund in 2017. [40965/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Reducing waiting time for patients for hospital operations and procedures is a key priority for the Government and €50 million was provided to the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) in 2018 to secure treatment for patients. The estimated actual care expenditure to the end of September is €33.6m.

The Inpatient/Day Case Action Plan, published last April outlines the combined impact of HSE and NTPF activity in 2018. The Inpatient Day Case Waiting List figures published by the NTPF for August are showing an ongoing improvement with almost 74,200 patients waiting for hospital operations and procedures. This is a reduction of almost 9,800 compared with August 2017. There has been a significant reduction of almost 7,300 in the number of patients waiting longer than 9 months for an inpatient or day case procedure since this time last year.

The NTPF advise that in 2017, 9,500 patients accepted offers of treatment, while almost 6,000 patients were treated last year and to the end of September 2018, almost 18,000 patients accepted offers of treatment, while over 14,300 have completed their treatment.

In addition, the NTPF are working closely with Hospital Groups inviting proposals to facilitate the trialling of funded interventions for Outpatients, including weekend and out of hours clinics. At the end of September had approved almost 12,700 outpatient appointments.

Services for People with Disabilities

308. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the position in relation to the application by an organisation (details supplied) for further annual investment in its care centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40970/18]

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.

Hospitals Data

309. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons that required in-hospital treatment for diabetes related to foot complications and lower limb loss; the amount allocated to Naas General Hospital in this regard in the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40971/18]

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.

General Practitioner Contracts

310. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if an organisation (details supplied) will be recognised in negotiations on the new GMS contract; the status of the new GMS contract negotiations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40977/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Government is committed to engaging with the representatives of general practitioners on the development of a package of measures and reforms to modernise the 1989 GMS Contract.

Officials from my Department and the HSE met with the Irish Medical Organisation at the beginning of May to set out the State's position in relation to reform of the GMS contract.

Agreement on the delivery of service improvements and contractual reform has the potential to facilitate a substantial increase in the resourcing of general practice on a multi-annual basis. Engagement with GP representatives on contractual issues is expected to recommence in the coming weeks.

I have acknowledged that the National Association of General Practitioners is anxious to be involved in discussions about reform and I have indicated my willingness to consult with them on issues facing general practice.

General Practitioner Contracts

311. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health the status of the review of free general practitioner care contract for children under six years of age; when this review will be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40982/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): A review of the GP Contract governing the provision of care to children under six years of age has not commenced. My first priority is the development of a package of measures and reforms to modernise the 1989 GMS Contract.

The goal is to develop a contractual framework that has a population health focus, providing in particular for health promotion, disease prevention and for the structured care of chronic conditions.

Agreement on the delivery of these much needed service improvements and contractual reforms has the potential to facilitate a substantial increase in the resourcing of general practice on a multi-annual basis as well as enabling GPs to better meet the needs of patients. Engagement with GP representatives on contractual issues is expected to recommence shortly.

Health Services Funding

312. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if the general practitioner capital fund will be reinstated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40983/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I assume the Deputy is referring to the General Practice Development Fund which was in operation between 1993 and 2010. There are no plans to reinstate this fund. However, the Government is committed to engaging with GP representatives on the development of a package of measures and reforms to modernise the 1989 GMS contract.

The goal is to develop a contractual framework that has a population health focus, providing in particular for health promotion, disease prevention and for the structured care of chronic conditions. This will enable general practitioners to better meet the needs of patients and will also promote general practice as a viable and rewarding career for both existing doctors and future medical graduates.

There is potential for State expenditure on General Practitioner services to increase significantly in coming years if the talks are successful. Engagement with GP representatives on contractual issues is expected to recommence in the coming weeks.

Health Services Provision

313. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if the case of a person (details supplied) will be examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40986/18]

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.

Question No. 314 answered with Question No. 270.

Question No. 315 answered with Question No. 271.

Services for People with Disabilities

316. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the number of initial assessments of need of children with disabilities that are carried out per community healthcare organisation annually. [40999/18]

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

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

Services for People with Disabilities

317. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the qualifications that must be held by assessment-of-needs officers; the number of officer positions nationally; his views on whether this number is adequate in meeting assessment demands; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41000/18]

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.

Dental Services Expenditure

318. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health when the pre-economic crisis budget for the dental treatment services scheme will be reinstated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41001/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Dental Treatment Services Scheme (DTSS) provides dental treatments to medical card holders. In 2010 the range of treatments provided under the Scheme was reduced in order to cap expenditure at the 2008 level of €63 million. Expenditure on the DTSS in 2017 was €63.3 million. The HSE continues to monitor the operation of the DTSS to ensure the most beneficial, effective and efficient use of available resources.

A new National Oral Health Policy is currently being developed and I expect it will be published later this year. The aim of the policy is to develop a model of care that will enable preventative approaches to be prioritised, improve access, and support interventions appropri-

ate to current and future oral health needs. It is proposed that any future budgetary changes will be considered in the context of achieving these aims.

Autism Support Services

319. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the level of funding being provided to an autism support organisation in each CHO area in each of the years 2011 to 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41002/18]

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.

Autism Support Services

320. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the provision in 2018 in each CHO area for autism assistance dogs for persons who may require one; the provision made in each of the years 2011 to 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41003/18]

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.

HSE Reviews

321. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health when the 2017 review of the HSE National Review of Autism Services - Past, Present and Way Forward 2012 will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41004/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): In September 2017, the Minister for Health requested that the HSE conduct a review of Autism services with a view to identify existing models of best practice.

The Department of Health also completed an epidemiological/research study into the prevalence and future projections for Autism Spectrum disorder.

Both reports were completed and submitted to the Minister earlier this year.

While there are no current plans to publish the HSE review, the findings and recommendations serve to inform the development of current and future Autism policy and services.

Assisted Human Reproduction Legislation

322. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the progress made regarding the establishment of a regulatory body for assisted human reproduction, including surrogacy further to the report of the Commission on Assisted Human Reproduction; his plans to introduce surrogacy legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41007/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As you will be aware, the Government approved the drafting of a Bill on assisted human reproduction (AHR) and associated areas of research, which will be based on the published General Scheme, in October last year. This comprehensive piece of legislation encompasses the regulation of a range of practices, including: gamete (sperm or egg) and embryo donation for AHR and research; surrogacy; pre-implantation genetic diagnosis (PGD) of embryos; posthumous assisted reproduction; and embryo and stem cell research. The General Scheme also provides for an independent regulatory authority for AHR.

Officials in my Department are engaging with the Office of the Attorney General in relation to the process of drafting this Bill. The General Scheme is published on my Department's website and the Joint Committee on Health is currently conducting a review of the General Scheme of the Assisted Human Reproduction Bill 2017 as part of the pre-legislative scrutiny process, which began in January of this year.

The specific provisions relating to surrogacy are outlined in Part 6 of the General Scheme. These provisions outline the specific conditions under which surrogacy in Ireland will be permitted, including a requirement for all surrogacy agreements to be pre-authorised by the AHR Regulatory Authority. The Scheme also sets out a court-based mechanism through which the parentage of a child born through surrogacy may be transferred from the surrogate (and her husband, if applicable) to the intending parent(s).

Commercial surrogacy raises a number of concerns relating to the welfare and commodification of the children involved as well as the potential risks of coercion and exploitation of financially vulnerable women to act as surrogates. In light of this the General Scheme explicitly prohibits commercial surrogacy being conducted in Ireland.

The aim of the AHR legislation is to promote and ensure the health and safety of parents, others involved in the process (such as donors and surrogates) and, most importantly, the children who will be born as a result of AHR. Consideration of the welfare and best interests of children born through AHR is a key principle underpinning the Scheme.

Hospital Appointments Status

323. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) will receive a hospital appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41014/18]

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.

Midwifery Services Provision

324. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the estimated amount it would cost in a full year if 350 extra midwives were recruited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41023/18]

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

Medicinal Products Prices

325. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41028/18]

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

For a medicine to be considered for reimbursement by the HSE, it must first have a marketing authorisation from the European Medicines Agency (EMA) or the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA), before being assessed under the 2013 Act.

HSE decisions on which medicines are reimbursed by the taxpayer are made on objective, scientific and economic grounds, on the advice of the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE). The NCPE conducts health technology assessments (HTAs) for the HSE, and makes recommendations on reimbursement to assist HSE decisions.

The NCPE uses a decision framework to systematically assess whether a drug is cost-effective as a health intervention. This process ensures that only treatments that are clinical and cost effective are reimbursed.

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 protracted deliberative processes which are usually bound by strict confidentially clauses at the insistence of companies.

Nusinersen (Spinraza) is indicated for the treatment of 5q spinal muscular atrophy (SMA), a disorder characterised by progressive muscle atrophy and weakness.

In May 2017, the EMA granted market authorisation for nusinersen and in October 2017, the HSE received a reimbursement application for nusinersen.

In December 2017, the NCPE completed a HTA of nusinersen and did not recommend reimbursement at the price submitted. No decision has been arrived as yet on the application for the reimbursement of nusinersen as the statutory process is still on-going.

Two members of the Beneluxa Initiative (Belgium and the Netherlands) completed a joint negotiation for the reimbursement of nusinersen in July 2018. This process began before Ireland joined the collaboration and Ireland was not party to these negotiations.

In February I received the Report on Evaluating Orphan Drugs from the Joint Committee on Health. Currently my Department is examining the Committee's Report and its recommendations. The report raises some significant policy issues which require careful consideration by my Department, the HSE and the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics.

Hospital Appointments Status

326. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Clare will have knee surgery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41031/18]

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

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

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

Hospital Staff Data

327. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health if there are vacant posts at the maternity ward in Mayo University Hospital; if so, the length of time the posts have been vacant; the reason for the vacancies; when the posts are due to be filled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41044/18]

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

Mental Health Services Provision

328. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health the sale prices and dates of sale for each lot that comprised the former St. Senan's Hospital and associated lands in Enniscorthy; if the moneys achieved by the sales were ring-fenced for mental health services in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41046/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): Government policy as set out in 'A Vision for Change' is that proceeds from the sale of older mental health assets, such as St. Senan's, will be reinvested in new developments within mental health.

I understand new replacement accommodation has already been delivered for all the mental health care services provided from St Senan's and the delivery of health services has been discontinued at the St Senan's site.

The use of the sales proceeds from the disposal of St. Senan's will be subject to sanction from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. It would be intended that the proceeds of the sale of this property will be invested in much needed mental health and other facilities in addition to the very significant Exchequer funding required to maintain and improve health infrastructure.

As the management of the healthcare property estate is a service matter, your question has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

329. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health if access to new treatments for MS patients (details supplied) will be introduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41051/18]

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

In line with the 2013 Act, if a company would like a medicine to be reimbursed by the HSE through the community drugs schemes, it must first submit an application to the HSE to have the new medicine added to the reimbursement list.

As outlined in the 2016 Framework Agreement with the Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association (IPHA), and in line with the 2013 Act, the HSE will decide, within 180 days of receiving the application (or a longer period if further information is sought from the company), whether to add the medicine to the reimbursement list, agree to reimburse it as a hospital medicine, or refuse to reimburse it.

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

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

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

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

I have indicated a willingness to meet with MS Ireland and a mutually convenient date has been agreed provisionally in the coming weeks.

Diabetes Strategy

330. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Health the next steps as determined by the HSE in finger test strip utilisation monitoring with respect to the management of patients with diabetes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41052/18]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

331. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health the status of a medical appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41054/18]

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.

Drug and Alcohol Task Forces

332. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the progress he has made to develop a performance measurement system which will improve accountability across local and regional drug task forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41079/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): Measuring the overall effectiveness of the response to the drug problem is an important objective of drug policy. Resources are best directed towards interventions and strategies which are most likely to lead to a reduction in problem substance use and an improvement in public health, safety and well-being.

The national drugs strategy, Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery, commits to operationalising a performance measurement system by 2020. The system is primarily concerned with the overall effects of implementing the drugs strategy at a population level, including the effects on the health, well-being and quality of life of people living in areas served by the Drug and Alcohol Task Forces (DATFs).

Work is ongoing in the Department, in association with key stakeholders, on the revision of the 'Task Force Handbook'. It is intended that the revised handbook will contribute to improving the overall governance and accountability of Task Forces. This work is an important preliminary step in the development of a performance measurement system.

The performance measurement system incorporates a resource allocation model to enable DATF funding to be allocated on a more equitable and rational basis, which takes account of underlying need in local areas and targets those communities which face a higher risk of substance misuse. The criteria to be used to determine the allocation of resources to Task Forces will be developed in consultation with key stakeholders, including DATFs.

Drug Treatment Programmes

333. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if he will address issues raised in correspondence (details supplied) regarding the opioid overdose medication Naloxone; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41085/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): Drug-related overdoses and other forms of avoidable mortality associated with drug use are a major concern for the national drugs strategy. This is where the greatest share of health costs associated with drug use arises and where the largest potential benefits from effective intervention can be achieved. The provision of targeted preventative responses for drug users vulnerable to overdose is thus a key objective of the strategy, in order to reduce drug-related deaths.

Naloxone is an antidote used to reverse the effects of opioid drugs like heroin, morphine and methadone, if someone overdoses. In 2015 the HSE established a Naloxone Demonstration Project, which involved 600 patients receiving take-home Naloxone and the provision of training to lay persons, such as the family and friends of a drug user, in the administration of a Naloxone injection to overdose victims.

The demonstration project prevented many fatal overdoses for the individuals involved. The HSE is working to expand the Naloxone programme and will work on training more people in the use of Naloxone, increasing its accessibility and availability.

Naloxone is a prescription-only medicine that ordinarily can only be supplied on foot of a prescription. There is nothing to prevent a doctor from carrying this medicine, and similarly the friends and family of someone at risk from an overdose, if it has been prescribed to the person at risk. The HSE report no difficulties with the prescribing practice associated with the programme.

I am committed to expanding the availability of Naloxone to people who use drugs, their

peers and family members.

Diabetes Strategy

334. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Health if the finger test strip utilisation monitoring is indicating a cost or a saving over the six months since the FreeStyle Libre reimbursement scheme was launched on 3 April 2018 to young persons with type 1 diabetes aged between five and 21 years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41091/18]

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

Diabetes Strategy

335. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Health the way in which persons who have qualified for the use of the FreeStyle Libre device and now turn 22 years of age are to be treated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41092/18]

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

Hospital Charges

336. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the way in which he will abolish inpatient charges for patients receiving treatment for cancer; when these charges will be abolished; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41095/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Act 1970 (as amended) provides that all people ordinarily resident in the country are entitled, subject to certain charges, to public in-patient hospital services including consultant services and to public out-patient hospital services. Under the Health (Amendment) Act 2013, a person who has been referred to a hospital for an in-patient service, including that provided on a day case basis, will have to pay the statutory daily charge, currently €80 per day, up to a maximum of €800 per year. Such charges do not apply to medical card holders.

On this basis, where treatment for cancer is classed as a day case procedure and is not carried out in an out-patient setting, the public in-patient charge applies.

Patient Data

337. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons receiving inpatient treatment for cancer who do not qualify for a medical card and do not have private health insurance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41096/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the Health Service Executive

to respond to the Deputy directly.

Pharmacy Regulations

338. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding pharmaceutical assistants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41101/18]

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 20 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.

Disease Incidence

339. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if annual data on the number of persons presenting and being diagnosed with Lyme disease is being recorded; the steps he has taken to address any increases in cases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41115/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) is responsible for the surveillance of notifiable infectious diseases such as Lyme disease. The HPSC website (*www.hpsc.ie*) gives extensive information on Lyme disease diagnosis, treatment and how to avoid tick bites.

As this PQ refers to service issues regarding Lyme disease, I have referred it to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Medical Card Reviews

340. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) will be refunded for medication the person purchased while the person's medical card was being reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41116/18]

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

Disability Services Data

341. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the level of unmet personal assistant hours; the level of met personal assistant hours; his plans to undertake research on the matter in order that planning for future budgets can be costed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41120/18]

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

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

Medical Aids and Appliances Applications Data

342. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health the number of children waiting to be fitted for shoes, pedro boots and insoles for same by county (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41121/18]

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

International Programmes

343. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Health if he plans to continue with

Ireland's participation in the human biomonitoring programme DEMOCOPHES; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41123/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Ireland's participation in DEMOCOPHES (DEMOnstration of a study to COordinate and Perform Human biomonitoring on a European Scale) ended in November 2012 when the project came to a conclusion. The milestones and key findings of DEMOCOPHES are explained in the final report available at the following website: *eu-hbm.info/euresult/media-corner/press-kit*.

Ireland has continued its participation in the human biomonitoring sphere by its involvement in an initiative called 'HBM4EU'. The main aim of this initiative is to coordinate and advance human biomonitoring in Europe so as to provide better evidence of the actual exposure of citizens to chemicals. HBM4EU runs for five years, from 2017 to 2021.

Rare Diseases

344. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health the progress of the rare diseases medical product technology review committee; the drugs that have been referred to it by the HSE; the way in which it is scheduling or prioritising the review of each drug; the number of drugs it expects to review in 2018; the timelines associated with reviewing medicines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41125/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the question refers to the National Rare Disease Technology Review Committee it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

HSE Staff

345. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding a HSE position; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41128/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I understand that the EB outreach nurse post is currently being funded by the HSE for 3 years, from January 2017 to the end of 2019 and that this post has hugely benefitted families and patients' ability and resilience to live with Epidermolysis bullosa.

Funding beyond 2019 to support this clinical nurse specialist outreach post will be considered within the HSE in the first instance next year in the context of service prioritisation for 2020 and with regard to competing priorities for resources available.

Health Services Funding

346. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding a budget 2019 request; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41129/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am aware that at the recent launch of a research report, DEBRA Ireland made a request for ringfenced funding for care packages for Epidermolysis Bullosa patients.

All funding requests are considered as part of the Estimates process in the context of competing priorities. However, funding for care packages is not based on specialty, but rather on an independent assessment of each individual case according to clinical need. This helps to ensure that the resources available are used in the most effective manner possible.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Eligibility

347. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health when the new contributory assessment conditions under the fair deal scheme will come into practice whereby land and businesses will be excluded after three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41135/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The proposed policy change to the Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS), 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 the legislation in the Oireachtas in the autumn session. My Department is working on the development of draft Heads of Bill while considering a number of ancillary policy and operational matters which may need to be addressed in the proposed legislation.

The impact of potential changes to the NHSS will be considered as part of Budget 2019, with changes expected to take effect next year following the legislative process. 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.

Disability Support Services Funding

348. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Health if the requested funding of €600,000 will be provided to an organisation (details supplied) to enable a respite facility to open 52 weeks of the year instead of 40 weeks a year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41142/18]

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

349. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a cataract operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41144/18]

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

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

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

Question No. 350 answered with Question No. 303.

Disability Support Services Funding

351. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health if the further €600,000 will be allocated to a group (details supplied) for its care centre in Dublin. [41152/18]

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

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

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

352. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if the finger test strip utilisation monitoring is indicating a cost or a saving (details supplied); the measures the HSE has determined to be the next steps in the finger test strips utilisation monitoring; the way in which persons that will turn 22 years of age in the next six months will be treated if they do not qualify for the reimbursement scheme any longer but would like to continue using it; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41153/18]

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

HSE Staff Data

353. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff across all grades working at the National Recruitment Service, Manorhamilton; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41155/18]

354. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the full budget allocated to the National Recruitment Service, Manorhamilton; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41156/18]

355. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the scope of responsibility of the National Recruitment Service, Manorhamilton; the facilities for which it is responsible for recruitment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41157/18]

356. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff vacancies unfilled both new and current across all grades at the National Recruitment Service, Manorhamilton (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41158/18]

357. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the number of vacant positions across all grades that are before the National Recruitment Service, Manorhamilton awaiting final appointment (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41159/18]

358. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the number of positions across all grades filled by the National Recruitment Service, Manorhamilton in each of the years 2011 to 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41160/18]

359. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff working at the National Recruitment Service, Manorhamilton; the budget assigned to it for each of the years 2011 to 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41161/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 353 to 359, inclusive, together.

I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly on this matter.

Hospital Staff Data

360. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff vacancies approved both current and new waiting to be filled by grade across all the statutory hospitals for each of the years 2011 to 2017 and to date in 2018 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41162/18]

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

HSE Agency Staff Expenditure

361. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the expenditure on agency staff by each statutory hospital in each of the years 2011 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41163/18]

362. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the expenditure on agency staff for all the voluntary hospitals in each of the years 2011 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41164/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 361 and 362 together.

I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly on this matter.

Health Services Staff Recruitment

363. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the average time to finally fill each position across all grades the national recruitment service, Manorhamilton, is responsible for over the years 2011 to 2017 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41165/18]

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

Maternity Services Provision

364. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health when anomaly scans will be available to all maternity patients at the Midland Regional Hospital, Mullingar; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41166/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Maternity Strategy is very clear that all women must have equal access to standardised ultrasound services. The Strategy is being implemented on a phased basis and this work is being led by the National Women and Infants Health Programme. The Programme's Implementation Plan for the Strategy includes a number of actions to facilitate the provision by all maternity hospitals/units of dating and anomaly scans to all pregnant women.

Furthermore, additional development funding of €4.15 million is being allocated to maternity services this year. The Programme has prioritised improving quality and safety, establishing community midwifery teams and increasing access to anomaly scans. I understand that the Programme has approved the appointment of an additional 28 ultrasonographers which was the total requirement identified to provide 100% access to anomaly scanning.

Pending the completion of the requisite recruitment and training processes, I am assured that the Programme will continue to work with the six Hospital Groups to assist in increasing access to anomaly scans for those units with limited availability. The Programme is also working with the Maternity Networks to ensure foetal medicine expertise is available when an anomaly is identified. In relation to the status of anomaly scan provision at the Midlands Regional Hospital Mullingar, I have asked the HSE to reply to you directly.

Maternity Services

365. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the amount expended outsourcing anomaly scans at the Midland Regional Hospital, Mullingar, in each of the years 2011 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41167/18]

366. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the number of births at the Midland Regional Hospital, Mullingar, in each of the years 2011 to 2017; the number of anomaly scans carried out in each of those years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41168/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 365 and 366 together.

As the queries raised by the Deputy relate to a service issue, I have asked the HSE to reply to you directly.

HSE Data

367. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the number of contracts and the accumulated total of all contracts procured for each year to date since the establishment of the HBS procurement service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41169/18]

368. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff across all grades working at the HBS procurement service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41170/18]

369. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the budget allocated to the HBS procurement service versus expenditure for each year since its establishment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41171/18]

372. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the number of services and contracts awaiting procurement at the HBS procurement service across all hospital groups; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41174/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 367 to 369, inclusive, and 372 together.

I have asked the HSE to respond directly to you as this is a service matter.

Health Services Staff Data

370. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the expenditure on agency staff costs in each of the years 2011 to 2017 at the Midland Regional Hospital, Tullamore; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41172/18]

371. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the number of unfilled staff vacancies both current and new across all grades at Midland Regional Hospital, Tullamore; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41173/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 370 and 371 together.

I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly on this matter.

Question No. 372 answered with Question No. 367.

Medical Card Administration

373. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if the medical card application process will be reviewed to assess under discretionary medical grounds before assessing income (details supplied). [41183/18]

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 among its conclusions was the recommendation that a person's means should remain the main qualifier for a medical card. This position remains unchanged.

Nevertheless, every effort is made by the HSE, within the framework of the legislation, to support applicants in applying for a medical card and, in particular, to take full account of the difficult circumstances in the case of applicants who may be in excess of the income guidelines.

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

374. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health if funding for an additional community based diabetes podiatrist in County Limerick will be made available in the upcoming budget; the reason Limerick had the second largest year-on-year increase in the number of persons with diabetes hospitalised for foot ulceration treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41187/18]

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.

Question No. 375 answered with Question No. 205.

Vaccination Programme

376. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a radio campaign is being run stating that the flu vaccine is free for at-risk groups but does not mention that a consultation fee may be charged as is stated on the HSE website; the steps he is taking in order to ensure the vaccine is free for at-risk groups; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41197/18]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities

377. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health if funding to a care centre (details supplied) will be increased in order that services can be expanded to support those with multiple sclerosis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41216/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will

empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

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

Health Services Staff

378. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that physiotherapists within the Health Service Executive who have submitted a section 38 registration application to CORU and are awaiting approval have not been allowed to continue to work as physiotherapists after 30 September 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41241/18]

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

Health Services Staff

379. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health if the number of physiotherapists within the Health Service Executive who have been downgraded to work as physiotherapy assistants while awaiting CORU registration and the impact it has on patient care will be examined; if this will be considered a break in service for employees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41242/18]

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

Health Services Staff

380. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the status of CORU physiotherapist registration processing times; if he is satisfied that processing times are adequate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41243/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The two year transition period for the Physiotherapists in question to register with the Physiotherapists Registration Board (CORU) commenced in September 2016. This means that these physiotherapists were required to have applied for registration by 30 September 2018.

During this two year period, CORU met with and continually encouraged physiotherapists to register in a timely manner. This included visits by the CEO and her team to many hospitals and meetings with the union and the professional body. Extensive information was made available on the registration process and, in particular, the documentation to be submitted by the applicant and the time lines involved in processing an application, including Garda vetting. I met with the Irish Society of Chartered Physiotherapists on number of occasions in 2017 on various issues and requested that they have their members register with CORU without delay.

A number of Physiotherapists left it until the closing stages of the two year period to apply for registration, with much of the documentation submitted being incomplete despite extensive information having been made available by CORU at various information session over the past two years and comprehensive information on the application process been made available on its website. CORU is working tirelessly in assisting late applicants gain entry to the Register of Physiotherapists and is keeping all applicants updated on their application for registration.

Ministerial Communications

381. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health if there is a policy regarding ministerial use of private email for Government business in his Department; and if so, if it will be published. [41525/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): There is no specific policy regarding Ministerial use of private email for Government business in place in the Department. Such matters are pertinent to the office of the Taoiseach.

All users on the Department's network must adhere to the ICT acceptable usage policy document which states that "As there is no way of filtering the messages relayed by these providers, they pose a potential security threat. Users may not transmit sensitive or classified information using any 3rd party e-mail services." Login access to webmail services are blocked from within the Department's network.

Official Engagements

382. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health if he or officials in his Department attended the 2018 Ryder Cup; if so, the reason they attended; the days on which they attended; the officials they met from a Ryder Cup organisation or the European Tour; and the costs for each individual's attendance. [41537/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Neither I nor my junior Minister colleagues attended the Ryder Cup. I have surveyed the Department for details of any officials from the Department attending in an official capacity. I can confirm that no one has reported that they did so. The travel officer has also confirmed that no flights were booked in association with this tournament.

Meat Processing Plants

383. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if information has been received or research completed on the meat-processing pilot scheme proposed by the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41043/18]

409. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if collaboration has taken place with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection as mentioned on 14 May 2018 with regard to the pilot scheme addressing labour shortages in the meat-processing sector proposed by the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation; the details of meetings that have taken place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41041/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 383 and 409 together.

Labour supply issues have arisen in various parts of the agri-food sector, but they have been most pronounced in the meat processing sector and on-farm horticulture and dairy sectors. While some potential exists to recruit labour from within the domestic and European labour markets, it became apparent in recent times that this would be insufficient to meet the demand and therefore, I and my officials worked with the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, Heather Humphreys, and her Department to introduce a pilot quota of employment permits for non-European Economic Area (EEA) nationals for these three sub-sectors. So far, 750 permits have been allocated to meat processing, and of these, 448 have been issued (as of 05/10/18). Given the level of demand, it is anticipated that the full allocation will be used in the near future. A remuneration threshold of €22,000 was introduced for these permits, with employers obliged to ensure access to suitable accommodation and training, including language training.

I said at the time of the announcement of these permits that they were just one piece of the jigsaw in addressing labour supply and that the sector must also continue to intensify its efforts to source labour from both the domestic and EU markets. In this regard, my officials have worked closely with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) to assist in these efforts. In May 2018, that Department hosted an information session with representatives from across the agri-food sector, including representatives from the meat processing sector, as well as officials from my Department, the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (DBEI) and the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC). This meeting provided information to the sectoral representatives on the range of employment initiatives and supports that DEASP can provide, from 'Intreo' to 'EURES' and more, while officials from DBEI and the WRC explained the employment permits system and obligations and responsibilities of employers. I understand the DEASP have continued and intensified their engagement with the agri-food sector since then, including the meat processing sector, with a range of different interactions including:

- Meetings with the meat, horticulture, pigs, poultry, forestry and horse racing employers and representative bodies.

- Job recruitment fairs, events, and course recruitment

- Future and ongoing recruitment campaigns both in Ireland and across Europe (EURES)

A further meeting was held in July with a range of industry bodies and individual employers (including the meat processing sector) to go through these initiatives and others in greater detail. The DEASP also held a dedicated information meeting with representatives of the meat industry and individual employers. Finally, I understand that DEASP officials have also had extensive engagement on a one-to-one basis with employers across the country.

Literacy Programmes

384. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the involvement of his Department in tackling adult literacy; if a financial allocation is provided for same; if so, the way in which it is utilised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40674/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department aims to ensure that the needs of all its customers are met and that rights to equal treatment

are upheld in the delivery of services. However, it is also conscious that some of its customers may have literacy difficulties and cannot easily access, understand and/or use information on the Department's schemes and services. In this regard, my Department has a number of measures in place including a "BrowseAloud" facility on its website which reads web pages aloud for people with literacy and/or visual impairments.

In accordance with Section 26(2) of the Disability Act 2005, two Access Officers have been assigned to ensure, when requested, that material can be provided in a format more suitable to individual circumstances.

Bearing in mind the need to communicate clearly in both written and verbal communications, my Department also provides step by step guidelines, user friendly explanatory manuals, question and answer sheets and working examples for most schemes, as well as telephone help lines to deal with queries.

There is no specific financial allocation provided as customer needs are met from within existing resources as required. This may involve additional expenditure in response to specific requests for assistance. For instance, my Department has provided:

- a reprinted version of scheme Terms and Conditions booklets in large fonts, and

- an audio version of scheme Terms and Conditions.

In addition to the above and as part of its quality customer service, my Department has put in place a Farmers Charter which among other things is intended to provide information in relation to the delivery of services and implementation of schemes in a clear, simple and easily understood format.

My Department's officials are available at all times to assist persons with any issues and to discuss or answer questions they may have on any of our farming schemes and services.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Applications

385. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an areas of natural constraint scheme, ANC, payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40751/18]

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 27th 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. Processing of this inspection necessitated the verification of the position on the ground by means of a field visit. This field visit has now been completed and the results are currently being processed to finalisation with the intention of issuing any payments due to the nominated bank account of the person named as soon as possible. In the event that any queries arise officials in my Department will be in contact with the person named.

Aquaculture Licence Applications

386. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding an aquaculture licence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40758/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department considers all applications for aquaculture licences in accordance with the provisions of the 1997 Fisheries (Amendment) Act, the 1933 Foreshore Act and applicable EU legislation. The licensing process involves consultation with a wide range of scientific and technical advisers as well as various Statutory Consultees. The legislation also provides for a period of public consultation.

In addition, the legislation governing aquaculture licensing provides for an appeals mechanism. Appeals against licence decisions are a matter for the Aquaculture Licences Appeals Board (ALAB) which is an independent statutory body. Full details of the appeals process can be obtained at: *http://www.alab.ie/appealsprocess/*

In accordance with the applicable legislation, the Statutory and Public Consultation phase in respect of these applications has concluded. As some applications for aquaculture and foreshore licences in Castlemaine Harbour are still under active consideration by my Department, and the period which allows for an appeal of a decision has not yet concluded for applications which have been determined, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on the matter at this time.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Applications

387. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a payment under the areas of natural constraint scheme, ANC, scheme will be made available to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40760/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The processing of the Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme application by the person named has now been completed and payment has issued to his nominated bank account.

Forestry Management

388. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to introduce a moratorium on forestry development in County Leitrim and a rebalancing of the focus on forestry throughout other counties to include regulations that will require full planning permission for the planting of forestry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40797/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The planting targets under the Forestry Programme 2014-2020 are national targets and aim to establish almost 44,000 hectares of new forests during the lifetime of the programme, and there are no county or regional specific targets within the programme. The Forestry Scheme is of course a voluntary scheme for all landowners and it is a matter for them as to whether they wish to choose forestry as a land use option and avail of the grants and premiums available to support them in that enterprise.

In Leitrim, some 380 farmers have made this choice by converting parts of their farms to forestry resulting in forestry payments to them worth over €2.3m from my Department in

2017. In addition timber sales in the country were valued at €1.2m in 2017 and 565 people are employed in the forestry sector in County Leitrim which is a valuable contribution to the local economy. In fact this employment rate in the forestry sector is the highest by far of any county in Ireland. I intend to continue making this option available to other farmers in Leitrim so that they have the opportunity to avail of the scheme and complement their farm income if they so wish.

In terms of permission for the planting of forestry my Department is the designated planning authority for forestry in Ireland. Forest planning under the afforestation schemes takes account of a number of factors including local concerns, environmental guidelines and site conditions. Proposals to plant trees under this programme are subject to rigorous checks and undergo careful planning by professional foresters which must comply with the Department's requirements as set out in the Forestry Standards Manual, Scheme Documents, Code of Best Practice – Ireland and a suite of environmental guidelines including the Environmental Requirements for Afforestation and the Land Types for Afforestation. There are also a number of statutory consultees who are consulted on individual applications where relevant and these include the Environmental Protection Agency, NPWS and Inland Fisheries Ireland amongst others. I am satisfied that this planning process is fit for purpose and that it ensures that the establishment of new forests in Ireland is compatible with the protection and enhancement of our environment, particularly in relation to water, biodiversity, archaeology, soil type and the landscape.

Forestry Management

389. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on whether the concerns of the farming community in County Leitrim should be addressed and as a result new forestry licence applications in the county should be denied in view of the fact that it has reached the national per county target for forestry of 18.9%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40827/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I am very conscious of concerns expressed about planting in Co. Leitrim and I want to reiterate that there are no county or regional specific targets for forestry planting in Ireland. The planting targets under the Forestry Programme 2014-2020 are national targets and aim to establish almost 44,000 hectares of new forests during the lifetime of the programme.

The Forestry Scheme is voluntary for all landowners and it is a matter for them as to whether they wish to choose forestry as a land use option and avail of the grants and premiums available to support them in that enterprise. Afforestation as a land use can work for farmers by supporting existing agricultural activity. For example it is an option for farmers who wish to diversify their income stream or increase profitability while maintaining their agricultural output.

Forestry does not necessarily mean a reduction in agricultural output nor does it mean converting the entire farm to forestry.Instead where land is underutilised, it allows for a more efficient use of land bringing the entire farm closer to its productive potential. Most importantly this approach introduces a stable and additional income into the farm. This new income stream can be used to develop the farm business as part of the overall plan for the farm. It is worth noting that 380 farmers in Leitrim have recognised this by converting parts of their farms to forestry resulting in forestry payments worth over €2.3m from my Department in 2017. In addition, timber sales in the county were valued at €1.2m in 2017 and 565 people are employed in the forestry sector in County Leitrim which is a valuable contribution to the local economy.

Agrifood Sector

390. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on whether suckler cow farmers from counties Sligo and Leitrim will benefit from an increased price for their animals if the growing international trend of food being classified as carbon-neutral food arrives here in view of the high level of forestry and carbon reduction plants in the counties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40831/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): It should be noted, that in accordance with competition law, neither I, nor my Department, have a role in determining prices for any commodity including suckler beef.

However, I am keenly aware of the importance of the suckler sector to Ireland's rural economy and the wider agri-food industry. The sector is an integral component to the overall vitality and continued strength of beef farming in rural Ireland. My Department currently provides a range of income and investment supports to suckler farmers, including direct payments and grant schemes such as BPS, ANC, GLAS and TAMS, as well as the Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP), many of which have also significant benefits in terms of environmental sustainability.

Origin Green is the world's first national food and drink sustainability programme, bring together all actors in the food supply chain – from farmers to food producers, retailers to food service operators – with the common goal of achieving more sustainable food production. Bord Bia's consumer insight research has established that such sustainability credentials are increasingly important for both consumers and retail customers world-wide.

My Department continues to actively engage in the whole of government approach on carbon neutral initiatives to examine the best means of encouraging sustainable development of Irish food production systems, while optimising the sectors contribution to greenhouse gas mitigation and sequestration including through afforestation and other forest sector activities.

Forestry Grants

391. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to introduce a scheme that encourages landowners to plant trees into hedgerows in order to increase the levels of forestry that does not require prime agricultural land; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40833/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Department's Afforestation Grant and Premium scheme is the States principal measure for increasing national forest cover. Under the current Forestry Programme 2014 -2020, the aim is establish 44,000 hectares of new forests. The Department encourages farmers to incorporate forestry into their farming mix so that agricultural production can continue alongside timber production.

In doing so the Department has introduced planting types that may be more suitable to farmers such as agroforestry and forestry for fibre. Agroforestry allows farmers to plant trees and allow their animals graze this land at the same time. Forestry for fibre supports the growing of trees such as eucalyptus and poplar that can be harvested for firewood after just 15 years, much shorter than traditional forestry which has a rotation of 35 - 40 years. There are no plans under the afforestation scheme to plant trees into hedgerows.

It is worth noting that the Department implemented two targeted Agri-Environment schemes

since 2010 which included the planting of new hedgerows and native trees. Under the Agri-Environment Options Scheme (AEOS), which opened in 2010, some 581,000 trees were planted under the Broadleaved Tree Planting measure and circa 1,653,000 metres of hedgerow established under the Planting New Hedgerows measure. Under the current Green Low-Carbon Agri-Environment Scheme (GLAS) some 1,661,000 trees have been planted under the Planting a Grove of Native Trees measure and circa 1,201,000 metres of hedgerow established under the Planting a New Hedgerow measure.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Applications

392. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if an area of natural constraints application by a person (details supplied) will be accepted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40857/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The processing of the Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme application by the person named has now been completed and payment has issued to his nominated bank account.

Fodder Crisis

393. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will consider introducing a voucher-based meal subsidy as a part of a future fodder support scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40861/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): A survey of Fodder supplies in September indicated that the potential national fodder deficit has reduced from 18% this summer to 11%,with further reductions anticipated since this survey was conducted, as farmers continue to harvest fodder.

My priority is to support the conservation of as much fodder for the coming winter as possible from our own resources, and to supplement this with necessary imports as required. To achieve this I introduced a number of targeted measures:

I introduced 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.

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. 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 Pillar 1 and 2 payments which 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, following consultation with the EU Commission, my Department made some temporary adjustments to the GLAS scheme for this year and in consultation with my ministerial colleague Mr. Eoghan Murphy T.D., a two week extension of the closed period for the spreading of chemical and organic fertilisers was announced and has allowed farmers capitalise on autumn grass growth for fodder production.

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, is the most effective response to ensuring adequate supplies ahead of the coming winter and I have no plans to introduce a meal voucher subsidy. However I can assure you that I will continue to closely monitor and engage on this significant challenge during the coming period.

Basic Payment Scheme Applications

394. **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. [40864/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named submitted an application under the Basic Payment Scheme and the Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme on 15 May 2018.

This application is currently undergoing a number of administrative checks concerning eligibility and payment cannot issue until these checks are completed.

An official from my Department has contacted the person named directly regarding this matter.

Fishery Harbour Centres

395. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will bring forward the fishery harbour centre (rates of charges) order Bill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40883/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department owns, manages and maintains the six State-owned Fishery Harbour Centres, located at Castletownbere, Dingle, Dunmore East, Howth, Killybegs and Ros An Mhíl.

I would advise the Deputy that charges for the use of the facilities at each of the six Fishery Harbour Centres is set out in secondary legislation by means of Statutory Instrument. Currently, the Fishery Harbour Centres (Rates and Charges) Order 2012 (S.I. No. 214 of 2012) which came into effect on the 1st July 2012 sets out the fee schedule applicable at the six Fishery Harbour Centres.

My Department is currently undertaking a review of the 2012 order and expects to engage in a Public Consultation on the matter in early 2019 as part of the review process, as required by legislation.

Basic Payment Scheme Payments

396. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the single farm payment will be issued; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40897/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Advance payments under the BPS are due to start from October 16th. This is the earliest possible date on which advance payments can be made. For 2018, the Department has made arrangements to set

the BPS advance payment at 70%, rather than the standard 50%.

Advance payments will continue on a rolling basis after the 16th October in order to ensure that cases are paid once they are cleared. The balancing payments due under the BPS (30%) will then commence from the start of December 2018. As usual, the BPS payment will also include the payment under the Greening Scheme.

GLAS Eligibility

397. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the GLAS section will accept a review of the decision to exclude a person (details supplied) from the GLAS scheme on medical grounds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40899/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I am advised that there is no record of a GLAS contract in place for the applicant referred to. Department officials have been in direct contact with the Deputy's office to obtain a herd number, which is the primary GLAS identifier, for the person named. When this information is received, my officials will provide a reply directly to the Deputy concerned.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Applications

398. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an ANC payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40900/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The processing of the Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme application by the person named has been completed and payment has issued to his nominated bank account.

Basic Payment Scheme Applications

399. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a BPS payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40905/18]

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

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, should the holding meet 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.

Advance payments under the Basic Payments Scheme (BPS) are due to commence on 16 October 2018 with a 70% advance payment issuing to cleared cases. The balancing payments under BPS will commence in December 2018.

TAMS Applications

400. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a penalty applied to a dairy equipment targeted agricultural modernisation scheme, TAMS II, grant in respect of a person (details supplied) will be considered as an obvious error in view of the fact that on two occasions he in contact with his Department's helpline seeking clarification during the online application process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40906/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named made an application for mobile sheep handling equipment under the Animal Welfare and Nutrient Storage Scheme TAMS II on 20 November 2015.

The applicant's planner contacted the Department while submitting the claim for payment and was advised to submit the required details of actual items purchased. A claim for payment was submitted on 20 July 2017 which included investments which were not purchased which resulted in an over-claim penalty being applied.

The applicant was advised of the position in a letter from the Department dated 20 August 2018. A written request for a review of this decision was received and the case is currently being reviewed by the Department. The applicant will be advised in writing of the outcome.

Should the applicant remain dissatisfied with the outcome of this review it will remain open to them to submit an appeal to the Agriculture Appeals Office.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Data

401. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of farmers that have yet to receive areas of natural constraints, ANC, payments by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40931/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Payments under the 2018 Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) scheme commenced, on schedule, on 18 September 2018 with payments of €185.6 million issuing to some 77,000 applicants. To date in excess of €194.4 million has issued to over 80,600 applicants.

While the total number of applicants under the 2018 scheme who have the minimum level of designated land is 100,339 it should be noted that the number of applicants actually paid on an annual basis is generally between 95,000 and 96,000. This is because many applicants fail to fulfil the scheme eligibility criteria either on area required or on stocking density and retention requirements. In such instances no ANC payment can issue. Some other applicants only qualify for payment towards the end of the year and pay runs will continue on a regular basis as further cases are cleared for payment.

The number of applicants paid to date is as follows -

County	Applicants	Number Paid	Paid Amount
Carlow	733	600	1,429,813.94

County	Applicants	Number Paid	Paid Amount
Cavan	4,736	4,125	9,441,477.93
Clare	5,989	4,974	12,459,305.70
Cork	7,056	5,526	14,497,415.34
Donegal	8,630	6,639	17,724,121.51
Dublin	159	122	300,065.08
Galway	11,865	9,627	22,948,056.08
Kerry	7,593	5,856	16,265,488.38
Kildare	528	411	840,322.07
Kilkenny	1,712	1,258	2,893,638.48
Laois	1,675	1,340	2,947,355.81
Leitrim	3,406	2,815	7,070,264.60
Limerick	2,911	2,309	4,961,282.04
Longford	2,339	1,899	4,317,028.59
Louth	784	623	1,215,765.33
Mayo	11,302	8,946	21,786,021.61
Meath	1,323	1,076	2,125,795.25
Monaghan	4,010	3,441	7,165,828.77
Offaly	2,382	1,938	4,072,989.85
Roscommon	5,558	4,628	10,808,760.60
Sligo	3,911	3,061	7,361,639.16
Tipperary	4,416	3,607	8,452,286.58
Waterford	1,417	1,094	2,684,446.60
Westmeath	2,625	2,200	4,591,013.85
Wexford	1,488	1,106	2,260,490.09
Wicklow	1,791	1,394	3,804,451.01
Total	100,339	80,615	194,425,124.25

Knowledge Transfer Programme

402. **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 (details supplied); the steps he will take to rectify the situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40932/18]

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 19,070 out of approximately 19,100 farmer payments, amounting to approximately €12.5m, have issued across all 6 KT Sectors.

The persons named were partners in a Registered Farm Partnership with both participating in the Knowledge Transfer Dairy Programme. The partnership was dissolved in July 2017 impacting on processing of their payments for Year One with part payment issued to one of the persons named. Work is ongoing to finalise this case and issue a balancing payment to the persons named.

Farm Data

403. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of calves born in the suckler herd register on 30 June 2017 and 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40972/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The number of calves born to beef breed dams as extracted from the Animal Identification and Movement database (AIM) for the period 1 January to 30 June 2017 is 727,571. The figure for the corresponding period in 2018 is 701,833.

I am keenly aware of the importance of the suckler sector to Ireland's rural economy and the wider agri-food industry. The sector is an integral component to the overall vitality and continued strength of beef farming in rural Ireland. My Department currently provides a range of income and investment supports to suckler farmers, including direct payments and grant schemes such as BPS, ANC, GLAS and TAMS, as well as the Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP). According to National Farm Survey data, suckler farmers receive support equivalent to approximately €500 per suckler cow on average.

I have also provided €20 million for a Beef Environmental Efficiency Pilot Scheme in 2019.

Greyhound Industry Data

404. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the organisation that has statutory function regarding the regulation of greyhound exports; the regulations in place in relation to same; his plans to update these regulations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40979/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed)(Deputy Michael Creed): The position regarding the export of dogs, including greyhounds, from Ireland is as follows:

The vast majority of dogs that are moved from Ireland go to the UK. Trade within the EU of dogs is governed by EU law. Dogs moved to another EU country must be accompanied by an EU pet passport, be microchipped, and have a valid rabies vaccination.

The premises exporting dogs must be registered with my Department in advance of the export. Before travel, dogs must undergo a clinical examination by an authorised veterinarian, who must verify that the animals show no obvious signs of disease and are fit to be transported. Dogs must also have a health certificate issued by a Department veterinarian. These procedures, including vaccination, ensure that only healthy dogs, over the age of 15 weeks, may be exported. Exporters must also comply with EU law on the protection of animals during transport. The transport of animals by air is also governed by the International Air Transport

Association (IATA). In this context, I am aware that a number of airlines do not transport commercial consignments of greyhounds.

The welfare of greyhounds is regulated by the Welfare of Greyhounds Act 2011 and the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013.

My Department has a close working relationship with animal welfare charities on all aspects of animal welfare. Officials of my Department have met with the welfare members of the International Greyhound Forum, which includes the Dogs Trust, the ISPCA and Bord na gCon, where issues surrounding the export of greyhounds are considered.

Departmental Expenditure

405. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the contribution made to the World Organisation for Animal Health in each of the years 2015 to 2018, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40980/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The OIE is the global standard setting body in respect of animal health and animal welfare. Its membership comprises 181 countries from around the world. In the years 2015 and 2016 Ireland's annual subscription was €102,765. In 2017 the annual subscription was €123,315. In 2018 this contribution increased to €126,150.

Separately, my Department entered into a commitment to fund an additional €75,000 per year in the period 2017-20 with a view to supporting the OIE's activities to enhance animal welfare worldwide.

Farm Data

406. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payments will issue to persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40993/18]

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 12th May 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. Processing of this inspection necessitated the verification of the position on the ground by means of a field visit. This field visit has been completed and the results are currently being processed to finalisation with the intention of issuing any payments due to the nominated bank account of the person named as soon as possible. In the event that any queries arise officials in my Department will be in contact with the person named.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Applications

407. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an areas of natural constraint, ANC, payment for a persons (details supplied); and

if he will make a statement on the matter. [41012/18]

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 23rd March 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. Payments due under the Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme will issue shortly to the nominated bank account of the person named.

GLAS Payments

408. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when advance payments under the 2018 GLAS scheme will issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41017/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The 2018 advance payments for GLAS are scheduled to commence before the end of November. All GLAS participants have been notified of this and other expected scheme delivery dates. Approval has been secured from the EU Commission to make these payments at the higher rate of 85%.

All scheme requirements must be fulfilled before a payment can issue. This includes the need to finalise Commonage Management Plans (CMPs) and to submit annual Rare Breed and Low Emission Slurry Spreading returns where these actions have been chosen as part of a GLAS plan.

Nutrient Management Plans (NMPs) must also be submitted in respect of all GLAS 3 cases. Participants are also reminded of the need to undertake a one day GLAS Training course, participants who have not done so should arranged to attend a course without delay.

Scheme participants without outstanding requirements should contact their advisors to ensure that all requirements have been met to allow the payment to be made.

Question No. 409 answered with Question No. 383.

Basic Payment Scheme Payments

410. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when an overdue farm payment will be processed and issued to persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41049/18]

413. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when an overdue farm payment will be processed and issued to persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41089/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 410 and 413 together.

An application under the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) was received on 27th February

2018 under the herd number provided in the name of one of the persons named. Subsequently, an application was received under the BPS in the names of both persons named.

As part of the validation process for all BPS applications, the two applications have been linked. Further processing is required to finalise the entitlement position for these applications, and this is currently being progressed.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Payments

411. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a 2018 area of natural constraints, ANC, payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41050/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The processing of the Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme application by the person named has been completed and payment has issued to his nominated bank account.

Young Farmer Capital Investment Scheme Data

412. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a balancing payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41055/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named made an application under the Young Farmer Capital Investment Scheme of TAMS on 12 January 2017. A letter dated 15 February 2017 issued to the applicant advising that the education documents supplied did not meet the educational requirements set out in the Terms and Conditions of the Scheme to qualify for the grant of 60% under the Young Farmer Capital Investment Scheme - as distinct from the standard grant rate of 40% available under all other TAMS II measures. No further evidence was received.

A claim for payment was submitted on 29 January 2018 and payment of the 40% grant was made on the 29 March 2018. To date no documentary evidence of the educational requirements having being met has been received by my Department. Should such evidence be received the matter will be further considered.

Question No. 413 answered with Question No. 410.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Payments

414. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a 2018 area of natural constraints payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41090/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The processing of the Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme application by the person named has been completed and payment has issued to his nominated bank account.

EU Meetings

415. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the bilateral meetings he has had with his EU counterparts over the past six months regarding Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41196/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed)(Deputy Michael Creed): As part of my ongoing efforts to ensure that my EU counterparts are fully aware of Ireland's concerns about the impact of Brexit on the agri-food and fisheries sectors, as well as ensuring that they understand our 'asks' from the EU/UK negotiations, I have engaged extensively with Member States since the UK referendum in June 2016. These engagements include formal bilateral meetings in capitals and in the margins of EU Council of Agriculture Minister meetings as well as regular, more informal, contacts around Council meetings. In the last six months these engagements have included:

- on April 16 I met the Danish Minister for Fisheries, Ms. Karen Ellemann, in the margins of the Agriculture and Fisheries Council in Luxembourg;

- I also met the Austrian Minister for Sustainability and Tourism, Ms. Elisabeth Köstinger in the margins of the Agriculture and Fisheries Council in Luxembourg on April 16;

- on April 25 I met the Dutch Minister for Agriculture, Ms. Cornelia Schouten, in The Hague;

- on 2 May I met the French Minister for Agriculture, Mr. Stéphane Travert, in Paris;

- I also met the German Minister for Agriculture, Ms. Julia Klöckner, in Berlin on 2 May;

- on 5 June I met the Belgian Minister for Agriculture, Mr. Denis Ducarme, in the margins of the Informal Meeting of EU Agriculture Ministers in Sofia, Bulgaria; and

- I also met the Danish Minister for the Environment and Food, Mr. Jakob Ellemann-Jensen, in the margins of the Informal Meeting of EU Agriculture Ministers in Sofia on 5 June.

In each of these bilateral meetings I have apprised the Ministers of the current position on the negotiations from an Irish perspective, as well as assessing the degree to which they are likely to continue supporting our efforts to have the agri-food and fisheries impacts of Brexit adequately taken account of in the negotiations.

On June 13 I met the UK Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Mr. Michael Gove, at the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in London.

In addition I chair a meeting of the European Peoples Party before each Council of Ministers meeting, during which the issue of Brexit is discussed.

I also attended the most recent Informal Council meeting in Schloss Hof in Lower Austria on 23 September where I had informal discussions with many of my colleagues on Brexit.

Further meetings are planned over the coming months, including with Romania, who will take over the Presidency of the EU in January 2019.

Farm Data

416. **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. [41203/18]

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 12th May 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 is currently being processed with the intention of issuing any payments due as soon as possible. In the event that any queries arise officials in my Department will be in contact with the person named.

Farm Data

417. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason for the delay in payment of the area of natural constraint, ANC, scheme and the single farm payment to a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41213/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An application under the 2018 Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme was received on 24 April 2018 from the person named. Processing of the application has recently been completed and the payment due will issue to the nominated bank account in the coming days.

Advance payments under the Basic Payment Scheme are due to commence for cleared cases on 16 October.

Official Engagements

418. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he and or officials in his Department attended the 2018 Ryder Cup; if so, the reason they attended; the days on which they attended; the officials they met from a Ryder Cup organisation or the European Tour; and the costs for each individual's attendance. [41531/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Neither I nor any of my officials attended the 2018 Ryder Cup in any official capacity.

Electric Vehicles

419. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the measures in place to rectify the outage of fast charging points for electric vehicles; the number of these charging points out of service; the timeframe in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41200/18]

420. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the issue with the fast charging point for EV vehicles in Killarney, County Kerry will be resolved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41249/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 419 and 420 together.

The majority of the existing network of publicly accessible charge points was rolled out by the ESB through its eCars programme. This network includes circa 80 fast chargers, mainly on national routes. A map showing the charge points, including the status and availability of the charge points, is available on the ESB's website at www.esb.ie/ecars.

The maintenance and repair of these charge points is an operational matter for the ESB. In relation to the out-of-service charge point in Killarney, the ESB has informed my Department that the manufacturer is due to come to Ireland in the coming weeks to visit the charge point. At this point it is expected that the issue will be resolved.

The provision of charging infrastructure is a necessity for the uptake of electric vehicles. In this regard I welcome the publication last month by the Commission for Regulation of Utilities of their approval of ESB Networks' proposal on the future operation and maintenance of the charging network. This development ensures the continued operation and maintenance of the public charging network by the ESB and provides the certainty electric vehicle users need when purchasing an electric vehicle.

I understand that the ESB has commenced work to resolve the maintenance issues with the public charging network. This includes upgrades and, in the case of those with the highest reliability issues, replacement of public chargers. I am informed that it has replaced 15 standard chargers, constituting 30 charge points as well upgrading seven older fast chargers with newer chargers that can accommodate all three charging types that are in active use in Ireland. The ESB advises me that the uptime of the fleet of fast chargers is in excess of 98% which is very high by international standards.

I would also highlight the role of the Climate Action Fund. The first Call for Applications, which I launched in July, includes provision for supporting electric vehicle charging networks along with a range of other project types. The deadline for applications has now passed and I can confirm that almost 100 applications have been received. An assessment process of these applications is currently underway.

Broadband Service Provision

421. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the date for the roll-out of high-speed broadband for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40642/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The premises referred to by the Deputy is in the LIGHT BLUE area on the High Speed Broadband Map, available on my Department's website, www.broadband.gov.ie. The LIGHT BLUE areas are where eir is in the process of deploying high speed broadband to 300,000 premises on a commercial basis.

Under a Commitment Agreement signed with me in April 2017, eir is in the process of passing 300,000 predominantly rural homes with high speed broadband. Approximately 175,000 of the committed premises have been passed as of Q2 2018.

More recent information received from eir on its overall fibre deployment indicates close to 200,000 premises have been passed throughout the country.

Further information on eir's planned rural deployment is available at *http://fibrerollout.ie/eircode-lookup/*.

Charities Regulation

422. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the rules and guidelines for registered charity clothing bins and non-registered clothing bins in public areas. [40736/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Clothes which have been donated for reuse fall outside the regulatory regime which controls the collection, sorting, storing or treatment of waste, regardless of whether the collection receptacle is owned by a charity or a non-charity.

I have no role or remit in terms of regulating charities. However, one way to check if a clothing collection receptacle is for a genuine charity is to check whether that charity is registered. The following link provides a list of registered charities in Ireland: *www.charitiesregulator.ie/en/information-for-the-public/search-the-charities-register*.

I understand that the placing of clothing receptacles in public areas may be subject to planning legislation, depending on the circumstances. However, you will be aware that, as Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, I have no role or remit in relation to planning policy or planning legislation.

Energy Policy

423. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the geothermal energy development Bill; when it is likely to be advanced further; the reasons for the delay in advancing this Bill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40759/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): An initial draft scheme of the Geothermal Energy Development Bill was developed in 2010 with the aim of providing a legislative framework for the vesting, licensing and regulation of the development of geothermal energy. Work on developing the draft Bill has been postponed since then until other legislative priorities have been dealt with, including the drafting, publication and enactment of the Minerals Development Act 2017. The focus of my Department's work in this area is now on developing the necessary regulation to enable the commencement of the 2017 Act and on the transposition of the Environmental Impact Directive into Minerals Development legislation.

Once these priorities have been achieved, the proposed geothermal regulatory framework will be reviewed to ensure its compatibility with the Minerals Development legislation and underlying energy policy in the context of the 2015 Energy White Paper.

At the same time, my Department has been involved in a number of other developments in the area of deep geothermal energy. The economic assessment that underpinned the development of the Support Scheme for Renewable Heat examined a range of potential heating technologies, including deep geothermal. The results of this assessment are published on my Department's website.

My Department is also actively engaged in projects evaluating deep geothermal potential in Ireland through the Geological Survey Ireland (GSI), and is part funding an EU initiative called GeoThermica in this area. GSI also recently hosted a workshop on developments and recent research in the area of deep geothermal which attracted over 50 attendees including participants

from overseas.

In addition the GSI and Enterprise Ireland business cluster, Geoscience Ireland, is a partner with agencies from France, Germany, Hungary, Spain and Turkey in an EU project on the supply of geothermal expertise to international markets. This project is being done under the EU COSME programme which is designed to enhance the competiveness of European Small and Medium-sized Enterprises.

Broadband Service Provision

424. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the progress expected in 2018 in the upgrade of the broadband telecommunications infrastructure for homes along the R157 from Maynooth, County Kildare (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40890/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Premises along the R157 fall into the AMBER and BLUE categories on the High Speed Broadband Map, available at www.broadband.gov.ie. The specific premises referenced by eircode in the Deputy's question falls into the AMBER area on this Map. The BLUE areas represent those premises where commercial operators are already delivering or have plans to deliver high speed broadband.

The AMBER areas represent the target areas for the proposed State led Intervention under the NBP and are the subject of an ongoing procurement process. My Department received the Final Tender submission from the bidding consortium on 18 September 2018. This is a significant milestone as the NBP procurement process enters its final stage.

For those premises currently awaiting access to high speed broadband, practical initiatives will continue to be addressed through the work of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce to address obstacles and improve connectivity in respect of existing and future mobile phone and broadband services.

Under this Taskforce, engagement between telecommunications operators and local authorities through the Broadband Officers is continuing to strengthen. These Broadband Officers are acting as single points of contact in local authorities for their communities. The appointment of these officers is already reaping rewards in terms of ensuring a much greater degree of consistency in engagements with operators and clearing obstacles to developing infrastructure. The Department of Rural and Community Development maintain a list of Broadband Officers, a link to which is available on my Department's website at www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/communications/topics/Broadband/national-broadband-plan/Pages/NBP-Information-Leaflets.aspx.

North-South Interconnector

425. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to Parliamentary Question No. 511 of 2 October 2018, when Eirgrid was given sight of the final reports relating to the North-South interconnector; the reason this information was not disclosed previously; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40967/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Eirgrid is a commercial State company which holds the licence, from the Commission for

the Regulation of Utilities, as transmission system operator (TSO) in Ireland, in accordance with EU and Irish law. CRU issued the licence to Eirgrid under S.14(1)(e) of the Electricity Regulation Act 1999 on 20th June 2001. In this role as transmission system operator, EirGrid, as the national authority, is responsible for the operation, development and maintenance of Ireland's electricity transmission system. Eirgrid's role is to deliver connection, transmission, and market services to generators, suppliers and customers utilising the high voltage electricity system and to put in place the grid infrastructure to support the development of Ireland's Economy. The International Expert Commission which conducted the technical study, that was published last week on the department's website, met with a number of bodies, including the CRU and EirGrid, during the course of their work. In their capacities as the national regulator and the transmission system operator, the final reports relating to the North South Interconnector were provided to both bodies in May of this year after the reports were finalised in March and April, and in advance of the request to both organisations for reports on the implications for the electricity market in Ireland in the event of a hard "Brexit", including for the SEM, for timelines for the delivery of programmes such as DS3 and the NSIC and for continued secure cross-border electricity trading across interconnectors . It was only after this additional Brexit analysis was completed in September that I brought the two independent reports to Government prior to their publication last week.

Broadband Service Provision

426. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when high-speed fibre broadband will be rolled out in an area (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41036/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The premises referred to by the Deputy is in the AMBER area on the High Speed Broadband Map which is available on my Department's website at www.broadband.gov.ie. The AMBER areas represent the target areas for the proposed State led Intervention under the NBP and are the subject of an ongoing procurement process. The procurement process to appoint a bidder for the National Broadband Plan State intervention network is now at the final stage. Evaluation of the final tender submission is ongoing and will be allowed the time required. On conclusion of the evaluation, my Department will make a recommendation to me on whether to appoint the bidder as preferred bidder and I will bring the matter to Government for decision.

For those premises currently awaiting access to high speed broadband, practical initiatives will continue to be addressed through the work of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce to address obstacles and improve connectivity in respect of existing and future mobile phone and broadband services.

Under this Taskforce, engagement between telecommunications operators and local authorities through the Broadband Officers is continuing to strengthen. These Broadband Officers are acting as single points of contact in local authorities for their communities. The appointment of these officers is already reaping rewards in terms of ensuring a much greater degree of consistency in engagements with operators and clearing obstacles to developing infrastructure. The Department of Rural and Community Development maintain a list of Broadband Officers, a link to which is available on my Department's website at www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/communications/topics/Broadband/national-broadband-plan/Pages/NBP-Information-Leaflets.aspx.

Climate Change Policy

427. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has examined a recommendation (details supplied); his views on the recommendations; the steps he has taken to establish a climate change independent body; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41080/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The report of the Citizens' Assembly was submitted to the Houses of the Oireachtas in April of this year, and the Houses subsequently established the Joint Committee on Climate Action to further consider the recommendations and report by the end of January 2019.

In the context of the consideration of each of the recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly it is now a matter for the Joint Committee to consider whether and how each recommendation might be taken up by Government. In this context, the Committee is engaging with all relevant Government Departments on their respective policies in place and their position in response to the Citizens' Assembly recommendations.

As I have previously indicated, I was pleased to note that many of the recommendations adopted by the Citizens' Assembly are already being addressed through the implementation of National Development Plan, the National Mitigation Plan and the Energy White Paper.

Addressing climate change and our targets to 2030 and beyond is one of the key policy priorities for this Government. Reflecting this priority, Ireland has established a very ambitious long-term decarbonisation objective through the National Policy Position on Climate Action and Low Carbon Development for 2050, and has already put in place robust governance arrangements to secure a strong co-ordinated approach to delivery of our ambition on climate action across all relevant Government Departments and Agencies.

The National Mitigation Plan published in July 2017 is a whole-of-Government Plan, reflecting, in particular, the central roles of the Ministers responsible for the four key sectors with the most significant contribution to national emissions - Electricity Generation; the Built Environment; Transport; and Agriculture, Forestry and Land Use - and draws on the perspectives of a range of other Departments.

I subsequently published Ireland's first statutory National Adaptation Framework in January 2018. Under the Framework, seven Government Departments and Agencies, with responsibility for the twelve priority sectors identified in the Framework, are required to submit sectoral adaptation plans to Government for approval by 30 September 2019.

Recognising the significant obligation which has been placed on the Local Authority sector to develop and implement its own climate action measures, I provided funding to establish and develop four Local Authority Climate Action Regional Offices. These offices will ensure links between sectors and provide expertise and capacity at local and regional level to contribute effectively to the national transition to a low carbon and climate resilient economy.

Engagement between the wider public and central and local Government will be underpinned by a structured process of dialogue and engagement under the National Dialogue on Climate Action, with the first, very successful, regional dialogue event taking place last June in Athlone.

The Climate Action High Level Steering Group, which I chair and which includes representation from all relevant Government Departments and Agencies, meets at least quarterly to drive progress by sectors and agencies on the implementation of both the National Mitigation Plan and National Adaptation Framework. This group, in turn, reports to the Cabinet Committee on Infrastructure, Environment and Climate Action, chaired by An Taoiseach.

Technical capacity for climate action policy development and implementation is provided through the Technical Research and Modelling Group (TRAM), which was established by Government Decision in 2015 and is chaired by my Department. TRAM is a high level cross-departmental technical group, with representation from relevant Government Departments and Agencies, supported by a number of academic institutions. TRAM reports to the Climate Action High Level Steering Group.

The Climate Change Advisory Council, an independent body established under Section 8 of the 2015 Act, is mandated to provide advice and recommendations to me, to relevant sectoral Ministers and to the Government in relation to the development and implementation of the National Mitigation Plan and National Adaptation Framework. The Council is also tasked with advising on matters relating to the achievement of Ireland's objective to transition to a low carbon, climate resilient and sustainable economy by 2050. Reports of the Advisory Council are available on its website at *www.climatecouncil.ie*

In accordance with the framework provided by the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015, the Government must prepare and submit to the Oireachtas an Annual Transition Statement. In support of this written Statement I, as well as other relevant Ministers, provide an oral report to each House. This process ensures that responsible Ministers are directly accountable to the Oireachtas to ensure real progress is made in reducing emissions in their respective sectors. I expect to be in a position to lay the 2018 Annual Transition Statement before the Houses in the coming weeks.

My Department is also working closely with other relevant Departments and Agencies on the preparation of the National Energy and Climate Plan through the structures described above. Preparation of this Plan has been in turn informed by work undertaken to prepare the Energy White Paper, the National Mitigation Plan, the National Adaptation Framework, and the National Development Plan.

In conclusion, I am satisfied that robust institutional and oversight arrangements, accompanied by significant resources, have already been put in place in recent years and are designed to ensure that delivery of Ireland's climate policy and integration of climate action is at the core of Government policy making.

Broadband Service Provision

428. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the roll-out of broadband to a village (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41154/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): In April 2017 I published an updated High Speed Broadband Map which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie. This map shows the areas targeted by commercial operators to provide high speed broadband services and the areas that will be included in the State Intervention Area under the National Broadband Plan.

There are 289 premises in the townland of Monkstown, Co. Cork. Approximately 116 (40%) fall within the AMBER area and will be served under the State led Intervention. 173 (60%) of premises are in a BLUE area and are or will be served by commercial providers.

The procurement process to appoint a bidder for the National Broadband Plan State intervention is now at the final stage. Evaluation of the final tender submission is ongoing and will be allowed the time required. On conclusion of the evaluation, my Department will make a

recommendation to me on whether to appoint the bidder as preferred bidder and I will bring the matter to Government for decision.

For those premises currently awaiting access to high speed broadband, practical initiatives will continue to be addressed through the work of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce to address obstacles and improve connectivity in respect of existing and future mobile phone and broadband services.

Under this Taskforce, engagement between telecommunications operators and local authorities through the Broadband Officers is continuing to strengthen. These Broadband Officers are acting as single points of contact in local authorities for their communities. The appointment of these officers is already reaping rewards in terms of ensuring a much greater degree of consistency in engagements with operators and clearing obstacles to developing infrastructure. The Department of Rural and Community Development maintain a list of Broadband Officers, a link to which is available on my Department's website at https://www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/communications/topics/Broadband/national-broadband-plan/Pages/NBP-Information-Leaflets.aspx.

National Broadband Plan

429. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he or officials in his Department met or corresponded with a company and or persons (details supplied) in the context of an aspect of the national broadband plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41189/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Neither I nor officials from my Department have met or corresponded directly with the individuals named by the Deputy. I understand that officials from my Department have corresponded and met with the Head of Operations of a company which I am informed is owned by the individuals named by the Deputy.

I am informed that the meeting, which took place on 4 July 2017, was in the context of that company selling retail services on eir's 300k rural fibre network, the deployment of which is subject to a Commitment Agreement I signed with eir.

Ministerial Meetings

430. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the context to his meeting in New York with a person (details supplied); the number of officials that attended the meeting with him; the reason the meeting was convened; the venue of the meeting; the persons that arranged the meeting; if minutes were taken of the meeting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41198/18]

436. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a member of the NBP tender evaluation team in his Department accompanied him to a meeting with a person (details supplied) in New York in July 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41247/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 430 and 436 together.

While visiting New York from 16 to 18 July 2018, to address the United Nations on Ire-

land's progress towards achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, the Irish delegation, including myself, was invited to attend a dinner hosted by the McCourt family.

I attended this dinner accompanied by my Private Secretary, by an Official from the Sustainable Development Division of my Department (Principal Officer) and my two Special Advisers. No official from the National Broadband Plan Division was in attendance as this was not an arranged meeting to discuss the National Broadband Plan.

The minutes of this meeting have been released by my Department under Freedom of Information and are available here: www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/about-us/compliance/freedom-of-information-(foi)/published-foi-requests/Pages/Disclosure-Log-2018.aspx.

National Broadband Plan Administration

431. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if all expressions of interest in relation to the national broadband plan that did not submit a final bid in the tender process will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41199/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I understand that 87 expressions of interest were received on the etenders portal from entities interested in the competition. The closing date for expressions of interest was 31 March 2016. In keeping with normal procurement practice it is not intended to publish details of those expressions of interest. Once a supplier expressed an interest, it could then access further documentation in relation to the procurement process. The fact that expressions of interest were made by entities interested in the project does not necessarily indicate that there was an intention to bid. For example, expressions of interest were received from a number of law firms, along with research and marketing agencies.

Official Engagements

432. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will provide a copy of his ministerial diary for the June, July, August and to month end September 2018 and a schedule of all meetings he has had during that time period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41201/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): A copy of my diary for the period 1 June to 30 September is set out in the following table.

CLINIC	Date
CONNECT THE DOTS WORKSHOP	01/06/2018
OFFICIAL OPENING OF ASH PARK RECREATIONAL PARK	01/06/2018
BALLINASLOE CLINIC	04/06/2018
SECRETARY GENERAL	04/06/2018
PRE-CABINET	05/06/2018
WEEKLY DEBRIEF AFTER CABINET	05/06/2018
LEADERS QUESTIONS	05/06/2018
SECRETARY GENERAL	05/06/2018
Physio	05/06/2018

CLINIC	Date
DINNER WITH MICHAEL BLOOMBERG	05/06/2018
ONLINE SAFETY ACTION PLAN BRIEF	06/06/2018
BRIEF IN ADVANCE OF ENERGY COUNCIL	06/06/2018
Physio	06/06/2018
LEADERS QUESTIONS	06/06/2018
MEETING ON GREENWAYS	06/06/2018
CONSTITUENCY BRIEF	06/06/2018
GOVERNMENT MEETING	06/06/2018
CONSTITUENCY	06/06/2018
LEADERS QUESTIONS	07/06/2018
VOTING TIME	07/06/2018
CLOONAKILLA NS OPENING	07/06/2018
CABINET COMMITTEE B	07/06/2018
CLINIC	07/06/2018
ANNE CRAUGHWELL	07/06/2018
CLINIC	08/06/2018
CPR TRAINING	09/06/2018
WEEK IN POLITICS	10/06/2018
FLIGHT LUXAIR - LG4884	10/06/2018
ENERGY COUNCIL	11/06/2018
EPP ENERGY MINISTERS MEETING	11/06/2018
FLIGHT LUXAIR - LG4883	11/06/2018
Physio	11/06/2018
PRE-CABINET	12/06/2018
GOVERNMENT MEETING	12/06/2018
WEEKLY DEBRIEF AFTER CABINET	12/06/2018
DIARY	12/06/2018
RESS UPDATE	12/06/2018
LEADERS QUESTIONS	12/06/2018
PAUL LYNAM & ENERGY UK	12/06/2018
BRIEF RE: NORTH SOUTH INTERCONNECTOR	12/06/2018
MICROSOFT	12/06/2018
OPENING CEREMONY OF THE OPENHYDRO TIDAL TURBINE ASSEMBLY FACILITY	13/06/2018
Min MB	13/06/2018
LEADERS QUESTIONS	13/06/2018
FLIGHT DUBLIN - CHARLES DE GAULLE AIRPORT	13/06/2018
OPENING CEREMONY OF THE OPENHYDRO TIDAL TURBINE ASSEMBLY FACILITY	14/06/2018
BILATERAL WITH CEO LAURENT SCHNEIDER MAUMOURY	14/06/2018
FLIGHT CHARLES DE GAULLE - DUBLIN	14/06/2018
CLINIC	15/06/2018
BALLINASLOE CLINIC	18/06/2018
GUM LITTER TASKFORCE LAUNCH	18/06/2018
SECRETARY GENERAL	18/06/2018
PHOTO CALL IN ADVANCE OF PROJECT IRE-LAND 2040	19/06/2018

CLINIC	Date
PRE-CABINET	19/06/2018
GOVERNMENT MEETING	19/06/2018
WEEKLY DEBRIEF AFTER CABINET	19/06/2018
LEADERS QUESTIONS	19/06/2018
ENERGY IRELAND 2018	19/06/2018
SECRETARY GENERAL	19/06/2018
DIARY	19/06/2018
GOVERNMENT MEETING	19/06/2018
PROJECT IRELAND 2040 EVENT	20/06/2018
Physio	20/06/2018
LEADERS QUESTIONS	20/06/2018
BRIEFING IN ADVANCE OF NATIONAL DIALOGUE ON CLIMATE ACTION	20/06/2018
CONSTITUENCY BRIEF	20/06/2018
CONSTITUENCY	20/06/2018
ENVIRONMENT COUNCIL BRIEF	20/06/2018
MEETING WITH CPL FUELS	21/06/2018
NBP STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT	21/06/2018
JEAN CLAUDE JUNCKER IN CHAMBER	21/06/2018
LEADERS QUESTIONS	21/06/2018
VOTING TIME	21/06/2018
DERMOT DIVILLY	21/06/2018
CABINET COMMITTEE C	21/06/2018
OFFICIAL OPENING OF STONEHAMS LAKE ANGLING PLATFORM	21/06/2018
CLINIC	21/06/2018
CLINIC	22/06/2018
LAUNCH OF REGIONAL AWARENESS CAMPAIGN - ANTI DUMPING INITIATIVE	22/06/2018
SCHOOL TOUR	22/06/2018
PILOT REGIONAL GATHERINGS UNDER THE NATIONAL DIALOGUE ON CLIMATE ACTION	23/06/2018
ENVIRONMENT COUNCIL	25/06/2018
BALLINASLOE CLINIC	25/06/2018
SECRETARY GENERAL	25/06/2018
PRE-CABINET	26/06/2018
GOVERNMENT MEETING	26/06/2018
WEEKLY DEBRIEF AFTER CABINET	26/06/2018
LEADERS QUESTIONS	26/06/2018
TV LICENCE MEMO BRIEF	26/06/2018
SECRETARY GENERAL	26/06/2018
TAOISEACH'S PQS	26/06/2018
BRIEF IN ADVANCE OF SPONSOR MEETING	26/06/2018
ENET/SSE SPONSOR MEETING	26/06/2018
Noel Grealish	26/06/2018
PMB	26/06/2018
LIVE IRELAND AM	27/06/2018
VIRGIN MEDIA PROJECT LIGHTNING EVENT	27/06/2018
LEADERS QUESTIONS	27/06/2018

CLINIC	Date
Physio	27/06/2018
TOUR GROUP	27/06/2018
CONSTITUENCY BRIEF	27/06/2018
NATIONAL ECONOMIC DIALOGUE	27/06/2018
CONSTITUENCY	27/06/2018
TOUR GROUP - FCA	27/06/2018
NDRC 'A DECADE OF INVESTING' DINNER	27/06/2018
DIARY	28/06/2018
Physio	28/06/2018
RESS MEMO BRIEF	28/06/2018
LEADERS QUESTIONS	28/06/2018
VOTING TIME	28/06/2018
SEA FEST	28/06/2018
CLINIC	28/06/2018
CLINIC	29/06/2018
MEETING RE: ROSALIE UNIT AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES	29/06/2018
BALLINASLOE CLINIC	02/07/2018
LUNCH WITH RICHARD PINTO	02/07/2018
SECRETARY GENERAL	02/07/2018
PRE-CABINET	03/07/2018
ENERGY EFFICIENCY BRIEF	03/07/2018
INCORPOREAL GOV MEETING	03/07/2018
DIARY	03/07/2018
COMMENCEMENT MATTER	03/07/2018
WEEKLY DEBRIEF AFTER CABINET	03/07/2018
LEADERS QUESTIONS	03/07/2018
IEN DIRECTORS & ENVIRONMENTAL PILLAR	03/07/2018
SECRETARY GENERAL	03/07/2018
MOTION RE. ESTABLISHMENT OF A SPECIAL JOINT COMMITTEE ON CLIMATE ACTION;	03/07/2018
TID	03/07/2018
MEETING RE MAYO RENEWABLE POWER PLANT	03/07/2018
MOBILE PHONE AND BROADBAND TASK-FORCE IMPLEMENTATION MEETING Q2	04/07/2018
Physio	04/07/2018
LEADERS QUESTIONS	04/07/2018
CONSTITUENCY BRIEF	04/07/2018
CLIMATE ACTION HIGH LEVEL STEERING GROUP	04/07/2018
CONSTITUENCY	04/07/2018
Physio	04/07/2018
GOVERNMENT MEETING	05/07/2018
LEADERS QUESTIONS	05/07/2018
VOTING TIME	05/07/2018
ROSALIE UNIT	05/07/2018
BRIEF IN ADVANCE OF HIGH LEVEL POLITI-CAL FORUM	05/07/2018

CLINIC	Date
OFFICIAL OPENING OF LONDIS, CIRCLE K & SUPERMACS	05/07/2018
CLINIC	05/07/2018
ELPHIN GAA 3 YEAR PLAN LAUNCH	05/07/2018
DIGITAL SKILLS FOR SME'S	06/07/2018
CLINIC	06/07/2018
ST HILDA'S SERVICES ART AND CRAFT EXHIBITION	06/07/2018
NATIONAL DAY OF COMMEMORATION CEREMONY	08/07/2018
BALLINASLOE CLINIC	09/07/2018
Job Announcement Event - Heather Humphreys	09/07/2018
WORKING LUNCH ON TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONSHIP	09/07/2018
PRE-BRIEF	09/07/2018
NBP BRIEF	09/07/2018
CABINET COMMITTEE A	09/07/2018
PUBLIC MEETING RE: ROSALIE CARE HOME	09/07/2018
PRE-CABINET	10/07/2018
GOVERNMENT MEETING	10/07/2018
WEEKLY DEBRIEF AFTER CABINET	10/07/2018
LEADERS QUESTIONS	10/07/2018
IRISH HEART FOUNDATION	10/07/2018
SECRETARY GENERAL	10/07/2018
IMMIGRANT COUNCIL OF IRELAND	10/07/2018
NOEL GREALISH	10/07/2018
MEMBERS RESTAURANT	10/07/2018
ACTION PLAN FOR ONLINE SAFETY LAUNCH	11/07/2018
COMMENCEMENT MATTER	11/07/2018
Physio	11/07/2018
LEADERS QUESTIONS	11/07/2018
DIARY	11/07/2018
LUNCH	11/07/2018
ARTS COUNCIL PHOTO CALL	11/07/2018
CONSTITUENCY BRIEF	11/07/2018
CONSTITUENCY	11/07/2018
Min MB	11/07/2018
CONSTITUENCY	11/07/2018
SECRETARY GENERAL	11/07/2018
Physio	11/07/2018
GOVERNMENT MEETING	12/07/2018
LEADERS QUESTIONS	12/07/2018
VOTING TIME	12/07/2018
LUNCH	12/07/2018
BRIEF WITH SEAI RE: SOLAR MICRO-GEN SCHEME	12/07/2018
BRENDAN TUOHY	12/07/2018
DEPARTMENT BBQ	12/07/2018
CLINIC	12/07/2018

CLINIC	Date
CLINIC	13/07/2018
UN HLPF	15/07/2018
FLIGHT DUBLIN - JFK	15/07/2018
Opening of the Ministerial Segment of the HLPF 2018	16/07/2018
Bilateral with Laos, Indonesian Lounge.	16/07/2018
First set of VNRs Ecuador, Lithuania, and Mali	16/07/2018
Meeting with Monique Barbut and announcement of Ireland's contribution to Great Green Wall Project.	16/07/2018
Meeting with IE stakeholders (primarily NGOs) attending the HLPF	16/07/2018
Meeting with David McCourt	16/07/2018
bilateral with President of International Fund for Agriculture and Development (SECCO campaign-related).	17/07/2018
Ireland's VNR, Ireland is one of 9 countries scheduled to deliver a VNR VITAL	17/07/2018
SDG Business Forum High-level Lunch - HEAD OF DELEGATION ONLY.	17/07/2018
Cabo Verde, Czech Republic, Greece and Kiribati.	17/07/2018
'Ireland's Innovative Use of Data to Monitor the SDGs' –Minister Naughten to give opening remarks. VITAL	18/07/2018
Meeting with Secretary-General's Special Representative for International Migration (SRSG), Ms Louise Arbour	18/07/2018
Bilateral meeting with Bhutan	18/07/2018
Bilateral Kiribati	18/07/2018
Bilateral with United Arab Emirates	18/07/2018
Bilateral with Turkmenistan	18/07/2018
Bilateral with Minister from Singapore	18/07/2018
Bilateral with Minister from Greece	18/07/2018
Bilateral with Minister from Egypt.	18/07/2018
Meeting with the President of the International Fund for Agriculture and Development	18/07/2018
Meeting with the High Representative for Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries, and Small Island Developing States	18/07/2018
Meeting with the Executive Secretary of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification	18/07/2018
General debate	18/07/2018
Keynote speech to HLPF by UN Secretary General, Mr António Guterres.	18/07/2018
Adoption of the Ministerial Declaration and the draft report of HLPF 2018, and Conclusion of HLPF 2018	18/07/2018
MEETING WITH FACEBOOK RE DISPATCHES PROGRAMME	19/07/2018
FLIGHT NEW YORK - DUBLIN	19/07/2018
CLINIC	20/07/2018
RETIREMENT FUNCTION	20/07/2018
LAUNCH OF ENERGY IN AGRICULTURE	21/07/2018
LAUNCH OF LANESBORO PUBLIC WIFI	21/07/2018

CLINIC	Date
AUGHRIM REMEMBERED EVENT	21/07/2018
2ND ANNUAL INTERCULTURAL EVENT	22/07/2018
BALLINASLOE CLINIC	23/07/2018
MEETING RE: BUDGET 2019 PROPOSED TAXATION MEASURES	23/07/2018

FB UPDATE	Date
SECRETARY GENERAL	23/07/2018
BRIEF WITH MM	23/07/2018
MINISTERIAL ROSTER	24/07/2018
PRE-CABINET	24/07/2018
DIARY	24/07/2018
GOVERNMENT MEETING	24/07/2018
WEEKLY DEBRIEF AFTER CABINET	24/07/2018
LEADERS QUESTIONS	24/07/2018
ENERGY EFFICIENCY PROJECT	24/07/2018
SECRETARY GENERAL	24/07/2018
Physio	24/07/2018
KARL BOYLE	25/07/2018
LEADERS QUESTIONS	25/07/2018
LUNCH	25/07/2018
CONSTITUENCY BRIEF	25/07/2018
CONSTITUENCY	25/07/2018
ESTIMATES 2019 DISCUSSION	26/07/2018
NATIONAL LEARNING NETWORK CERTIFICATE PRESENTATION	26/07/2018
LEADERS QUESTIONS	26/07/2018
VOTING TIME	26/07/2018
LUNCH	26/07/2018
CLINIC	26/07/2018
CLINIC	27/07/2018
UPDATE ON NBP	27/07/2018
OFFICIAL OPENING OF SOMERS PARK	29/07/2018
BALLINASLOE CLINIC	30/07/2018
SECRETARY GENERAL	30/07/2018
PRE-CABINET	31/07/2018
GOVERNMENT MEETING	31/07/2018
WEEKLY DEBRIEF AFTER CABINET	31/07/2018
LEADERS QUESTIONS	31/07/2018
SECRETARY GENERAL	31/07/2018
JAPAN COMMUNICATIONS INC.	31/07/2018
MINISTERIAL ROSTER	01/08/2018
DIARY	01/08/2018
LEADERS QUESTIONS	01/08/2018
LUNCH	01/08/2018
CONSTITUENCY BRIEF	01/08/2018
CONSTITUENCY	01/08/2018
LUNCH	02/08/2018
CLINIC	02/08/2018

FB UPDATE	Date
CLINIC	03/08/2018
Bank Holiday	06/08/2018
BALLINASLOE CLINIC	06/08/2018
GREAT GREEN WALL LAUNCH EVENT	08/08/2018
HEATHER HUMPHREYS ANNOUNCEMENT	09/08/2018
CLINIC	09/08/2018
OFFICIAL LAUNCH OF A BROADWAY CABARET ENCORE	09/08/2018
CLINIC	10/08/2018
BALLINASLOE CLINIC	13/08/2018
SECRETARY GENERAL	13/08/2018
SECRETARY GENERAL	14/08/2018
CLINIC	16/08/2018
CLINIC	17/08/2018
LAUNCH OF VOLUME 1 OF THE HISTORY OF BALLINLOUGH	18/08/2018
NBP BRIEF	20/08/2018
BALLINASLOE CLINIC	20/08/2018
ENERGY IN AGRICULTURE	21/08/2018
INTERVIEW WITH KEVIN O'SULLIVAN	21/08/2018
CLINIC	23/08/2018
CLINIC	24/08/2018
VITA HOUSE 25TH ANNIVERSARY	24/08/2018
Joint Venture-China.	25/08/2018
TRANSPORT TO DUBLIN CASTLE	25/08/2018
ADDRESS BY POPE FRANCIS	25/08/2018
POPE FRANCIS VISIT	26/08/2018
BALLINASLOE CLINIC	27/08/2018
ROSALIE UNIT MEETING	29/08/2018
NBP UPDATE	30/08/2018
SECRETARY GENERAL	30/08/2018
DIARY	30/08/2018
Minerals Exploration Drilling / Screening for EIA	30/08/2018
NSIC MEMO BRIEF	30/08/2018
AG LEGAL ADVICE UPDATE	30/08/2018
Physio	30/08/2018
INTERGOVERNMENTAL PANEL ON CLIMATE CHANGE	30/08/2018
CLINIC	30/08/2018
EAAE SEMINAR DINNER	30/08/2018
CLINIC	31/08/2018
Minister unavailable	31/08/2018
BALLINASLOE CLINIC	03/09/2018
SECRETARY GENERAL	03/09/2018
State dinner	03/09/2018
PRE-CABINET	04/09/2018
GOVERNMENT MEETING	04/09/2018
WEEKLY DEBRIEF AFTER CABINET	04/09/2018
DAVID MCREDMOND	04/09/2018

FB UPDATE	Date
SECRETARY GENERAL	04/09/2018
JOINT COMMITTEE MEETING RE: AN POST	04/09/2018
MEETING WITH MINISTER ROSS AND ATH-LONE MUNICIPAL DISTRICT	04/09/2018
BATTERY DIRECTIVE PHOTO CALL	04/09/2018
DIARY	05/09/2018
LEADERS QUESTIONS	05/09/2018
CONSTITUENCY BRIEF	05/09/2018
CONSTITUENCY	05/09/2018
Physio	05/09/2018
BORD NA MONA CEO & CHAIR	06/09/2018
DIARY	06/09/2018
NBP PROMOTIONAL VIDEO	06/09/2018
LAUNCH OF ROSCOMMON VOLUNTEER AWARDS 2018	06/09/2018
CLINIC	06/09/2018
CLINIC	07/09/2018
WILLIAMSTOWN HERITAGE WEEKEND	09/09/2018
SAN FRANCISCO	10/09/2018
BALLINASLOE CLINIC	10/09/2018
FLIGHT EI 147 DUBLIN - SAN FRANCISCO	10/09/2018
World Affairs Council event on “Women’s Role in Climate Justice” with Mary Robinson	10/09/2018
IDA Briefing over breakfast	11/09/2018
Meeting with Smart Wires, Inc.	11/09/2018
Meeting with Electric Power Research Institute, Inc. (EPRI)	11/09/2018
Meeting with Google	11/09/2018
Meeting with Facebook, Inc.	11/09/2018
OECD Event: Empowering Cities and Regions for Low Carbon and Inclusive Growth	12/09/2018
Meeting with Paul Wheelhouse, Scottish Energy Minister	12/09/2018
High-Level Talanoa on “A Rapid Transition to a Net-Zero Emissions Society”	12/09/2018
Powering Past Coal Alliance	12/09/2018
Bilateral with Mr. John Roome, World Bank	12/09/2018
GCAS Opening Reception	12/09/2018
Opening Plenary & Opening of the Call to Action	13/09/2018
High-Level Lunch	13/09/2018
Minster to deliver key note address at the high level panel on: “The Investor Agenda: Accelerating Action for a Low-Carbon World”	13/09/2018
US Climate Alliance Event: “Raising Global Ambition through National and Local Cooperation - A Dialogue with the U.S. Climate Alliance Governors, Ministers and World Leaders”	13/09/2018
Salesforce Meeting	13/09/2018
VIP reception at the Global Climate Action Summit for zero-emission vehicle (ZEV) leaders	13/09/2018
VIP Reception & Dinner	13/09/2018

FB UPDATE	Date
FLIGHT EI 146 SAN FRANCISCO - DUBLIN	14/09/2018
OFFICIAL OPENING OF SARSFIELD GAA GROUNDS	16/09/2018
Frenchpark Fun Run	16/09/2018
BALLINASLOE CLINIC	17/09/2018
ORAL PQ BRIEFING	17/09/2018
NBP UPDATE	17/09/2018
SECRETARY GENERAL	17/09/2018
CLIMATE ACTION MEMO BRIEF	17/09/2018
BILATERAL WITH TAOISEACH	17/09/2018
MEETING WITH TAOISEACH RE: NBP	17/09/2018
PRE-CABINET	18/09/2018
GOVERNMENT MEETING	18/09/2018
WEEKLY DEBRIEF AFTER CABINET	18/09/2018
LEADERS QUESTIONS	18/09/2018
SECRETARY GENERAL	18/09/2018
ORAL PQS	18/09/2018
BRIAN KING	18/09/2018
PMB - SINN FEIN RE: FUTURE OF THE POST OFFICE NETWORK	18/09/2018
DATA SUMMIT OPENING ADDRESS	19/09/2018
DUBLIN REGIONAL ENTERPRISE AWARDS 2018	19/09/2018
LEADERS QUESTIONS	19/09/2018
DIARY	19/09/2018
BRIEF GOV SENATORS	19/09/2018
CONSTITUENCY BRIEF	19/09/2018
COMMENCEMENT MATTER	19/09/2018
AUDIOLOGY MEETING WITH MINISTER HARRIS	19/09/2018
FIANNA FÁIL PMB - POST OFFICES	19/09/2018
Physio	19/09/2018
10th CITIZENS' ENERGY FORUM	20/09/2018
COMMISSIONER CANETE BILATERAL	20/09/2018
LEADERS QUESTIONS	20/09/2018
VOTING TIME	20/09/2018
CLINIC	20/09/2018
CLINIC	21/09/2018
REUSE MONTH LAUNCH	21/09/2018
BALLINASLOE CLINIC	24/09/2018
CHINESE AMBASSADOR	24/09/2018
AVANTCARD SITE VISIT	24/09/2018
SECRETARY GENERAL	24/09/2018
INCORPOREAL GOVERNMENT MEETING	25/09/2018
PRE-CABINET	25/09/2018
BRIEF IN ADVANCE OF BUDGET	25/09/2018
NWCI PRE-BUDGET BRIEFING DAY	25/09/2018
DIARY	25/09/2018
WEEKLY DEBRIEF AFTER CABINET	25/09/2018

FB UPDATE	Date
LEADERS QUESTIONS	25/09/2018
SECRETARY GENERAL	25/09/2018
PMB - NO CONFIDENCE MOTION	25/09/2018
PHOTO CALL WITH AN POST ELECTRIC VEHICLES	26/09/2018
LYME DISEASE RALLY	26/09/2018
LEADERS QUESTIONS	26/09/2018
A FAIR BUDGET 2019 - A CONVERSATION WITH OLDER PEOPLE	26/09/2018
IFA OIREACHTAS BRIEFING	26/09/2018
CONSTITUENCY BRIEF	26/09/2018
CCPC MEETING	26/09/2018
Physio	26/09/2018
BRIEF IN ADVANCE OF BUDGET	27/09/2018
GOVERNMENT MEETING	27/09/2018
LEADERS QUESTIONS	27/09/2018
VOTING TIME	27/09/2018
IRISH RURAL LINK RURAL SERVICES INFORMATION DAY	27/09/2018
Staff Retirement	27/09/2018
CLINIC	27/09/2018
CLINIC	28/09/2018
CLIMATE CHANGE ADVISORY COUNCIL	28/09/2018
BILATERAL WITH MINISTER DONOHOE	28/09/2018
YPO TOUR	28/09/2018
DIGITAL ASSIST PHOTOCALL	28/09/2018
SEAI PUBLIC LIGHTING VIDEO	28/09/2018
OFFICIAL LAUNCH OF SOUTH ROSCOMMON SINGERS FESTIVAL 2018	28/09/2018
OFFICIAL OPENING OF BALLINASLOE FAIR AND FESTIVAL 2018	30/09/2018

Ministerial Meetings

433. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the meetings he held with representatives of the remaining consortium for the national broadband plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41220/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): In my capacity as Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment I regularly meet with a range of representatives from the telecommunications and other sectors. Details of my diary have been placed on the record of the House in response to Question No [41201/18] on today's Order Paper.

Mining Industry

434. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the assistance provided to date or planned to assist those affected by the recent subsidence in Magheracloone, County Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the mat-

ter. [41244/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): Following the subsidence reported on September 24th in Magheracloone, County Monaghan, my officials have been liaising with the company and other relevant statutory authorities (Monaghan County Council and the Environmental Protection Agency) on an ongoing and regular basis and have continued to monitor the situation closely.

I understand that the family liaison office of Gyproc, the mine operator, has been in regular contact with the five affected families to provide support. The priority is returning these families to their homes as quickly as possible, subject to the results of expert reports, and one of these families has already returned to their house on the 28th of September. In the meantime, the company is continuing to provide the remaining affected families with alternative accommodation, transport and other needs to minimise disruption.

The company is also in contact with all local businesses in the affected area that are inconvenienced by the road closures while investigations into the incident are taking place. They are continuing to work with Monaghan County Council to ensure the area in question is safe for road users in order to allow normal service to resume for businesses in these areas.

I understand that Gyproc are also fully committed to assisting Magheracloone GAA Club and Community Centre. They remain in constant contact with the club and are committed to supporting them in securing new long-term facilities, as well as in sourcing short term facilities in the interim.

My officials will continue to provide assistance to Monaghan County Council, and the Environmental Protection Agency, until the matter has been fully resolved.

Mining Industry

435. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the assistance provided to date to statutory agencies in dealing with the issues arising from the subsidence in Magheracloone, County Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41245/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): Following the subsidence reported on September 24th in Magheracloone, senior geologists from my Department's Exploration and Mining Division (EMD) and I visited the site on Tuesday 25th September. Since then, EMD officials have been liaising with the company and other relevant Statutory Authorities (Monaghan County Council and the Environmental Protection Agency) on an ongoing and regular basis and have continued to monitor the situation closely.

The Geological Survey of Ireland also responded to a request for information from Monaghan County Council and met with officials in Carrickmacross on Tuesday 25th September. Specifically GSI host historic maps and reports in the National Mine Records Database, and were able to offer advice and survey and drilling services if required. In addition, expertise and advice on Mine Engineering was provided via the Geoscience Ireland business cluster.

I confirm that my officials will continue to provide all necessary assistance to Monaghan County Council, and the Environmental Protection Agency, until the matter has been fully resolved.

Question No. 436 answered with Question No. 430.

National Broadband Plan Administration

437. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a process of due diligence on all companies (details supplied) that are part of the consortium bidding for the national broadband plan will be conducted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41248/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Bidders wishing to participate in the ongoing NBP procurement process had to pre-qualify in order to participate in that process. Only those bidders that could demonstrate they had the necessary economic and financial standing, together with the required technical and professional capability, were allowed to participate in the procurement. I understand from my Department that the bidder which submitted its Final Tender to my Department on 18 September 2018 met these relevant thresholds set out for the procurement process. The procurement process to appoint a bidder for the National Broadband Plan State intervention network is now at the final stage. Evaluation of the final tender submission is ongoing and will be allowed the time required. On conclusion of the evaluation, my Department will make a recommendation to me on whether to appoint the bidder as preferred bidder and I will bring the matter to Government for decision.

Ministerial Communications

438. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if there is a policy regarding ministerial use of private email for Government business in his Department; and if so, if it will be published. [41519/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): My Department's policy document 'Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Policies for All Staff for E-Mail, Internet/Intranet & Computer Usage' sets out the basis for using ICT equipment and services in the Department. The Department's policy is that personal email accounts should not be used for official business as the Department provides the email infrastructure for employees to carry out their official functions.

I use both my Department and Oireachtas email accounts for work purposes. I do not use a personal email account to receive or send official business emails.

Official Engagements

439. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he and-or officials in his Department attended the 2018 Ryder Cup; if so, the reason they attended; the days on which they attended; the officials they met from a Ryder Cup organisation or the European Tour; and the costs for each individual's attendance. [41533/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I did not attend the Ryder Cup.

My officials did not attend the Ryder Cup in an official capacity.

Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

440. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the cost of both domestic and foreign consultants in respect of the BusConnects programme by the NTA; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40638/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has responsibility for the implementation and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA), including the BusConnects project.

Noting their responsibility with regards to this matter, I have forwarded your query to the NTA for their consideration and direct reply. Please notify my office if you have not received a reply within 10 working days.

Transport Policy

441. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the forthcoming Cork metropolitan transport study; and when it will be published. [40718/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As stated in the National Development Plan (NDP), the relevant local authorities, in partnership with both the National Transport Authority and Transport Infrastructure Ireland, are currently finalising a Cork Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy.

The Strategy will include proposals for a revised bus system for Cork and enhancements to the commuter rail service in Cork including additional stations and rail fleet. As referenced in the NDP, the Strategy will also provide for the evaluation of the potential of a Bus Rapid Transit or Light Rail corridor to serve the increased population growth out to 2040 as envisaged by the National Planning Framework.

The Strategy will be subject to public consultation prior to finalisation.

I am advised by the NTA that a draft Strategy is expected to be issued for consultation by the end of this year. Given the NTA's responsibility in the matter, I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the Authority for a more detailed reply on the current status of the Plan. Please inform my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Tourism Project Funding

442. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if funding is available for major projects such as the development of chair lifts and cable cars; if the development of such tourism projects will be supported in order to develop and promote hill walking tourism here similar to that across Europe; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40731/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The Deputy will be pleased to note that investment in activity-based tourism and tourist attractions has been prioritised under the National Development Plan 2018-2027, in order to

provide the type and quality of experience that visitors are seeking. Almost €108 million has been allocated to Fáilte Ireland for capital investment in tourism between 2018 and 2021 and it is intended that this level of funding will, at a minimum, be maintained over the lifetime of the National Development Plan. This investment will support and grow tourism across Ireland, in line with the further development and promotion of the regional tourism brand experiences.

However, although my Department provides funding to Fáilte Ireland for investment in tourism, it has no role in the administration of the agency's funding programmes or in the development of individual tourism sectors such as walking tourism. Accordingly, I have asked Fáilte Ireland to provide the Deputy with further detail in regard to investment in this sector and on the types of projects eligible for assistance under its capital grants schemes. Please contact my office if you do not hear within ten working days.

Rail Services Data

443. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the additional capacity that can be added to the existing services on the Kildare rail line in the second half of 2019 arising from the refurbishment of existing rolling stock that can be put into service;; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40914/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has responsibility for the implementation and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area including rail capacity enhancement projects as part of the DART Expansion Programme.

In light of the role of the NTA in this matter, I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for further response. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Dublin Airport Authority

444. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of persons required for a quorum on the board of the Dublin Airport Authority. [40927/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Constitution of daa provides that the quorum for the transaction of business by the Board is two directors.

Driver Licences

445. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when he will address the anomaly in SI No. 129/2017 of 4 April 2017 by which the amendment to the 2002 Act under section 33 of the 2016 Act was commenced by which a judge is only required to request a driver's licence in penalty point cases and not upon disqualification; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40934/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): This is not an anomaly, and it does not date to 2016.

Legislative provision requiring production of a driving licence in court for certain road

traffic offences was introduced in 2002. This was done because the Road Traffic Act 2002 introduced penalty points for the first time, and that Act therefore required production of a driving licence in cases which could involve the incurring of penalty points. The focus on cases relating to penalty points was to ensure recording of licence details if the person was convicted, and was there from 2002.

The 2016 amendment revised the procedure for production of a licence under the 2002 Act, as the existing procedure was felt to be less than optimal.

Where a person receives a disqualification from driving from a Court, they are legally required to return their driving licence to the Road Safety Authority. While it is true that this requirement is not met in many cases, the crucial issue in terms of public safety is whether people drive while disqualified. A person might return their licence and continue to drive, or not return their licence but not drive. Return of licences, while desirable, is no guarantee that a person will not drive after disqualification, and the figures not returning licences are not a proxy for the numbers driving while disqualified.

Road Safety Authority Data

446. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of disqualified drivers that subsequently surrendered their licences to the Road Safety Authority in each of the years 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018; the number of follow-ups undertaken by the RSA for the licences not surrendered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40935/18]

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.

Ports Policy

447. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the value of the debt associated with a port (details supplied) in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40952/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The State commercial port companies are independent commercial entities and my Department does not hold information on the current levels of debt held by port companies.

However, I can advise the Deputy that the annual reports and financial statements of all of the Port Companies including New Ross Port Company are laid before the Oireachtas and are publically available at:

http://opac.oireachtas.ie/liberty/libraryHome.do.

Transport Infrastructure Provision

448. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the Transport Infrastructure Ireland service station at the M11 site outside Gorey will open; the cost of building and maintaining the station to date by category and year; and the estimated lost

revenue from the service station since work finished in 2015.; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41047/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design and operation of individual roads is a matter for the relevant road authority in relation to local and regional roads, or for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), in conjunction with the local authorities concerned, in relation to national roads.

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

Railway Stations

449. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason clamping is allowed by a private company on the grounds of Kent train station, Cork. [41148/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. However, I am not involved in the day-to-day operations of public transport.

The issue raised is a matter for Iarnród Éireann and I have forward the Deputy's question to the company for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Haulage Industry

450. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if consideration will be given to the issues raised in a pre-budget submission by an association (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41182/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): My Department continues to work with haulage industry representative organisations to assist the sector. The haulage sector plays an important role in our economy and I recognise that it faces difficulties in the current environment. My Department is aware of the budget proposals submitted by the Irish Road Haulage Association. It should be noted, however, that any such budgetary provisions are ultimately a matter for the Minister for Finance.

Irish Aviation Authority

451. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the audit of section 32 of the Irish Aviation Authority Act 1993 will commence. [41250/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Section 32 of the Irish Aviation Act 1993 provides for an examination of the functions of the Irish Aviation Authority in so far as they relate to the application and enforcement of technical and safety standards in relation to aircraft and air navigation.

The IAA is also subject to similar, periodic, and very thorough examinations by the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) and by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) as part of its international obligations.

I am pleased to inform the Deputy that I have approved arrangements to engage external auditors to carry out a review as required under Section 32, which will involve a competitive tendering process. It is expected that the examination will commence before the end of the year, when this tendering process is complete.

Ministerial Communications

452. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if there is a policy regarding ministerial use of private email for Government business in his Department; and if so, if it will be published. [41530/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): My Department has an ICT Systems Usage Policy that provides a suite of IT policies governing the use of Departmental ICT systems by all users, with every effort being taken to obtain a balance between IT Security and the usability of Department systems. That Policy includes a section on how limited use of personal email is permitted, subject to the conditions set out in the policy document.

I can confirm, for the record, that I do not and have not used a private email account for Government business in the Department.

Official Engagements

453. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he and-or officials in his Department attended the 2018 Ryder Cup; if so, the reason they attended; the days on which they attended; the officials they met from a Ryder Cup organisation or the European Tour; and the costs for each individual's attendance. [41542/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Dáil Question No. 217 of 4th October on this matter.

The cost of each individual's flights were: Minister: €566.87; Special Advisor: €566.87; Secretary General: €509.98; Assistant Secretary General: €345.98. The cost for the Assistant Secretary General of €345.98 was for the outbound flight only. He was required to travel onwards to a meeting of Tourism Directors General arranged by the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union (1 and 2 October 2018).

Childcare Services Provision

454. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the details of an expansion of services in relation to Tusla in the Drogheda area; the number of persons expected to be employed; her long-term plans for the new facility; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40637/18]

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.

Departmental Funding

455. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the grants and funding issued to organisations and projects in Dublin 24 in 2018. [40696/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Details of the grants and funding issued to organisations and projects in Dublin 24 under the programmes and schemes administered by my Department in 2018 are set out hereunder.

Early Years Programmes and Services

Organisation	*Funding Provided €
Discoveries Creche & Montessori School Ltd	90,798.40
The Childrens House Montessori School	18,657.60
Carrigwood Playgroup	18,285.20
Castleview Community Playgroup	35,349.30
St Dominics Tots Playgroup	74,826.70
Ballycullen Montessori	55,098.44
Kilnamanagh Kids Creche & Montessori School	132,443.37
Glenview Montessori Pre-School	34,190.98
Toddling Tots	49,178.30
Four Seasons Pre-School	83,560.46
St. Kevins Childcare Centre	335,769.09
Young Explorers' Preschoool	155,928.80
Fonthill Lodge Daycare - Tallaght	76,275.86
Drysdale Montessori School	41,856.28
Headstart Pre-school	62,589.84
Stepping Stones Creche and Montessori	223,943.30
Naionra Chaitlin Maude Rath Miontain (Jobstown)	27,877.38
Daisy Chain Pre-School	87,106.74
Naíonra Santain Teoranta	94,589.30
Killakee Montessori & Creche	31,432.80
Step-n-Stones Montessori	33,369.72
Starlight Playgroup	60,243.00
Ashling Nursery and Montessori School	101,105.20
Bohernabreena Community Enterprise	119,186.48
Kingswood Pre school	29,370.50
Firhouse Montessori School	44,466.90
Mini Marvels Montessori School	15,421.80
Ard Mor Montessori - Respond Childcare	38,319.04
Early Steps Pre-school	70,886.70
The Little Childrens Centre - Fettercairn Community	143,792.40
Fledglings - St Anne's Fettercairn	53,945.80
Petal's	30,935.70
Cocoon Childcare - Tallaght	191,895.32
Cocoon Childcare - Citywest	197,426.30
St Marks Youth Club	54,386.40
Happy Days Playgroup	84,565.20
Happy Friends Playgroup	59,211.20

Organisation	*Funding Provided €
Chuckleberries - Hunterswood	163,645.50
First Rung Early Education	51,194.70
Balrothery Creche and afterschool	44,771.16
Tallaght Childcare Centre	230,615.98
An Turas	315,738.04
St Elmo's Pre-School	114,768.44
Jadd Childcare Service	50,244.44
Youth Horizons Ltd	46,375.76
Kingswood Childcare	53,295.72
Laugh and Learn Montessori	100,018.18
Barnados Millbrook Family Support Services	79,741.97
Rainbow House Educational Childcare Centre	60,145.32
Fledglings Kiltipper	68,374.75
Chuckleberries - Tree Tops	30,750.90
Scoil Iosa Playgroup	36,047.70
St Louise's Playschool	21,688.50
Brookview Childcare Service	74,816.30
Co-operative Childcare Brookview	27,080.44
Busy Beehive Preschool	191,216.90
The Links Creche Southside Ltd. CityWest	103,339.74
Tickles Childcare	108,235.10
Loreto Playgroup Ltd	95,891.70
Care & Cuddles Pre-school	124,800.62
Three Little Lambs	123,353.70
Little Ladybird Creche & Montessori Ltd	73,623.60
Kathy B's	91,071.50
Nurture Childcare AMNCH	46,173.50
Kidorama Academy Ltd	132,295.90
Laugh and Learn	79,609.90
Once Upon A Time - The Arena	79,769.78
Ferncourt Preschool	9,178.00
Precious Days Childcare Limited	33,615.60
Little Fairies Creche & Montessori Ltd	230,382.38
Naíonra Chaitlín Maude	271,358.85
Dublin West St Mary's	132,071.69
Diane's Breakfast and Afterschool Club	33,382.00
Twinkle Stars Preschool	9,788.00
Wombles Creche	94,308.88
Tallaght Childcare Fettercairn	83,837.26
Best Start Early Year Service Jobstown	20,858.70
Kids Inc St Killians	3,584.00
St Marks Preschool	23,988.00
Oakview Tallaght	139,869.90
Mrs Giggles	15,378.00
Starlight Preschool	16,054.20
Ard Mor Montessori - Respond Childcare	4,690.00

**Funding provided consists of the sum of all payments made from 1 Jan 2018 to date under 2017/18 and 2018/19 programme calls in the Dublin 24 area.*

In addition to the above the Deputy might note that Early Childhood Ireland (ECI) received funding of €1,190,000 from my Department in 2018 for the support of the Early Childhood Care and Education Programmes. My Department also provide additional funding to ECI on the agreement that they act as an "authorised signatory" and process applications for the Garda Vetting of its members. In 2018, the Department allocated funding of €222,080 to ECI for Garda Vetting.

Local Drug Task Force projects

Organisation/ Project	Funding Provided
St Aengus Neighbourhood Youth Project	€39,488.00
Youth Skills / Peer Education Tallaght	€23,292.00

Special Projects for Youth

Organisation/ Project	Funding Provided
Tallaght Youth Service	€473,505.00
West Dublin YMCA, Brookfield	€63,802.00
Tallaght Travellers Youth Service	€61,458.00

Young Peoples Facilities and Services Fund Rounds 1 and 2

Organisation/ Project	Funding Provided
Tallaght Travellers Youth Service	€34,927.00
Springfield Community Officer	€38,042.00
At Risk in Brookfield	€36,353.50
Community Addiction Response Programme, Killinarden	€30,252.25
Killinarden Community Council Youth Project	€147,369.00
Fettercairn Youth Project	€38,284.00
St Marks Youth Project, Fettercairn	€38,284.00
Brookfield Youth & Community Centre	€76,601.27
Big Issue Street League Tallaght	€1,035.98

Local Youth Club Grant Scheme

Organisation/ Project	Funding Provided
Newcastle Foroige	€450.00
Boy Girls Social Club	€450.00
St Anne's Baton Twirlers	€1,561.50
The Knights of Eanna	€450.00
Citywise Education	€ 1,000.00
Fettercairn Summer Project	€900.00
St Judes Summer Project	€ 1,000.00
Whitechurch/Ballyboden Summer Project	€800.00
Glenasmole Summer Project	€800.00
Holy Spirit Summer Project	€800.00

Quality and Capacity Building Initiative

Organisation/ Project	Funding Provided
Anam Cara Parental and Sibling Bereavement Support	€18,715
CDI (on behalf of South Dublin CYPSC)	€28,150
An Cosán	€32,470
Childhood Development Initiative Tallaght West	€50,215.64
KICK (Kickboxing to inspire)	€30,250

Area Based Childhood Programme

Organisation/ Project	Funding Provided
Tallaght West Childhood Development Initiative	€1,511,972

Children and Young People's Services Committees

Organisation/ Project	Funding Provided
Programme funding to support work of South Dublin CYPSC in their priority actions outlined in their 3 year plan	€20,000
Healthy Ireland funding paid through Pobal to support work of South Dublin CYPSC under Healthy Ireland initiative	€30,303

Other Programmes

Organisation/ Project	Funding Provided
Funding towards the Irish Foster Care Association`s National Conference (Children and Young People's Programme).	€12,981

Children in Care

456. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on the adequacy of decision-making support available for parents prior to placing a child in voluntary care; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40769/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla's policy is that social workers seek to keep children at home with their parents when it is deemed to be in their best interest, and when any risk can be managed safely. Tusla has introduced 'Signs of Safety', a child protection practice model which supports families working with social workers to develop safety plans for their children.

I am informed by Tusla that, when the need to place a child in care is being considered, the decision making supports for parents vary, depending on each family's circumstances. A parent may seek to have their child placed in care in some circumstance. This might arise, for instance, if a single parent, with little community support, needed to undergo treatment for a health issue.

In all cases, the first step is to keep children safely at home with supports from the State and/or from their own networks. If voluntary care is required, the possibility of this being available safely with family and friends is always considered in the first instance, and supported as appropriate.

Parents who seek voluntary care are brought through a supportive process to ensure they un-

derstand what they are requesting, including the possible impact on the child, and possible consequences that may arise if their home situation remains unsafe. Parents whose children need care for safety reasons, but who are reluctant to proceed with voluntary care, will be supported to understand their children's needs, the reasons that voluntary care is in their best interest and their right to consult with their solicitor.

The process for voluntary care requires parental consent. However, a parent can withdraw their consent at any time. If consent is withdrawn, a decision is made about the necessity to seek a court order. This will depend on whether it can be deemed safe to return a child to his or her parents' care.

In some areas there is a parent advocacy service. An advocate employed by Tusla or one of its funded organisations, is available to support the parents, either individually or in groups, to deal with issues arising and also to advocate on their behalf.

Early Childhood Care and Education Programmes

457. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on a matter (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40775/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Since September 2018, all children meeting the minimum age requirement of 2 years and 8 months are eligible for a full two programme years on the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme. This measure refines the development introduced in 2016 and increases the duration of each registered child on ECCE from a previous average of 61 weeks, to a potential duration of 76 weeks (two programme years). This delivers fully on a commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government that is good for children, families and Early Years providers.

This new measure will address the previous situation with regard to multiple entry points whereby there was a broad fluctuation in the number of free preschool weeks a child could avail of (between 61 and 88 weeks depending on the date of birth of the child) and will ensure a programme that is equitable for all children. The situation where there was more than one entry point created a perception of inequality to some parents when they considered the variance in the number of weeks of ECCE provision, dependant on their entry point.

It must be noted that age limits have been used to determine eligibility since the inception of the ECCE programme in 2010. These rules are a necessary component of any Government scheme and ensure that Exchequer funding is used for its intended purpose.

The upper age limit for the ECCE programme was set in consultation with the Department of Education and Skills. It ensures that children transition into primary school with their peers and limits the age range of children beginning primary school. Limiting the diversity in age ranges in children beginning primary school education is considered generally to be in the best interest of children, in relation to peer interaction in junior infants, as well as other educational considerations.

My Department does its best to ensure, in so far as possible, the equitable treatment of all children and families who apply for childcare funding under the ECCE Programme. In order to ensure objectivity and fairness, it is essential that clear rules exist for the scheme and that they are applied evenly. An essential component of the ECCE programme rules is an eligibility start date to ensure that the programme can be administered and budgeted for in an appropriate manner.

Early Childhood Care and Education Programmes

458. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to a cohort of children who are no longer eligible for the early childhood care and education, ECCE, scheme due to changes to the enrolment points eligibility criteria; if measures to cover those no longer eligible will be considered; if changes made to the enrolment points of the ECCE programme, being implemented from September 2018 in order to expand access, will be reviewed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41122/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): There is no question of any child losing entitlement to eligibility for the ECCE scheme. Rather ECCE eligibility has increased to two years.

From September 2018, all children meeting the minimum age requirement of 2 years and 8 months will be eligible for a full two programme years on the Early Childhood Care and Education programme (ECCE). The upper age ECCE requirement is that the child must not reach 5 years and 6 months before the end of the programme year.

This new measure will address the previous situation with regard to multiple entry points whereby there was a broad fluctuation in the number of free preschool weeks a child could avail of –(between 61 and 88 weeks depending on the date of birth of the child)– and will ensure a programme that is equitable for all children. The situation where there was more than one entry point created a perception of inequality to some parents when they considered the variance in the number of weeks of ECCE provision, dependant on their entry point.

The number of entry points reverted to one at the beginning of September 2018. One enrolment period at the start of the pre-school year will help to streamline the administration process and will make it easier for childcare providers to operate and budget for the programme year. It also makes it easier for parents to secure places on the ECCE programme for their children. There are currently no plans to change this single entry point.

Some children will not be able to commence their ECCE in September of the programme year as they will not have reached the age of 2 years and 8 months on or before 31st August. However, they will be able to commence ECCE in the following September and continue for a further year from September of the next programme year. Parents of children born around this time of the year may prefer for their children to start school at 4 rather than 5. These parents may therefore choose to avail of one year of ECCE only. However, it is important to note that this is a parental choice and that the overall policy change has ensured that two programme years are available to all children.

Departmental Communications

459. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if the Department has a policy regarding ministerial use of private email for Government business; and, if so, if it will be published. [41518/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The following text is an extract from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs' policy on the use of private email for Government business.

WebMail Services "As there is no way of filtering the messages relayed by webmail providers, they pose a potential security threat. Users may not transmit sensitive or classified infor-

mation using any 3rd party e-mail services. The Department reserves the right to ban access to 3rd party e-mail services if it is discovered that they are being used inappropriately."

Official Engagements

460. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she and-or officials in her Department attended the 2018 Ryder Cup; if so, the reason they attended; the days on which they attended; the officials they met from a Ryder Cup organisation or the European Tour; and the costs for each individual's attendance. [41532/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I did not attend the 2018 Ryder Cup, nor did my officials.

Community Services Programme

461. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of the next community services programme; when it will open for applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40699/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Community Services Programme (CSP) supports more than 400 community organisations to provide local services through a social enterprise model. Funding is provided as a contribution to the cost of a manager and an agreed number of full-time equivalent (FTE) positions. More than €46 million is available to support community organisations under the programme in 2018.

My Department continues to accept expressions of interest under the programme and funding for new organisations will be considered, in light of available budgets, during the year.

My Department will commence a review of the CSP shortly. The review will consider, among other things, how the programme fits with overall Government priorities as well as my Department's other community programmes and policy objectives. Decisions on the future shape and structure of the programme will be determined on foot of the review.

Leader Programmes

462. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if a review of the criteria will be carried out to allow childcare providers apply for Leader grants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40917/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): Funding under the LEADER Programme is targeted at innovative approaches to addressing the needs of rural areas as identified in the Local Development Strategies prepared for each sub-regional area. The funding can be provided under a broad range of themes, including enterprise development and social inclusion. It is important, however, to ensure that the available funding is targeted at policy areas where it can provide the greatest added value.

Provision of funding supports for childcare providers is available through the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the City and County Childcare Committee. It is not, therefore, proposed to extend the LEADER Programme to include childcare providers at present.

Rural Regeneration and Development Fund

463. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of applications received for the rural regeneration fund by the 27 September 2018 deadline; the process and timeline for assessing applications, by county, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41217/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The National Development Plan provides for an allocation of €1 billion for the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund to enable towns, villages and outlying rural areas to grow sustainably and support delivery of the strategic objectives of the National Planning Framework.

The Fund will be a key driver in supporting the revitalisation of rural Ireland, delivering a significant and sustainable impact for rural communities and helping to address issues such as de-population in small rural town, villages and rural areas.

Initial funding of €315 million will be allocated to the Fund over the period 2019 to 2022 on a phased basis.

The closing date for applications under the first call for the Fund was 27th September. I understand there is strong interest in the Fund from across the country with over 250 applications received. The completeness and eligibility of all applications received is still being verified by my Department. I shortly expect to be in a position to share information on the number of complete applications received, applications by category and their locations.

My Department has established a Project Advisory Board which will oversee during October/ November the assessment of applications for the Fund. The Board is Chaired by my Department and made up of representatives from key Government Departments, along with a number of independent external experts.

Following this recommendation I hope to make announcements on the first set of successful applications under the Fund in November.

Departmental Schemes

464. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the maximum number of applications permissible for each local authority for schemes (details supplied) in 2018; the allocation of funds, by county, for each scheme in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41218/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): My Department operates a suite of programmes designed to support rural communities. These include the Town and Village Renewal Scheme, the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme, the CLÁR programme, the Local Improvement Scheme and the Walks Scheme.

Town and Village Renewal Scheme 2018:

Under the 2018 Town and Village Renewal Scheme, Local Authorities were required to advertise for expressions of interest from towns/villages in their area and then select up to 12 proposals for development into detailed applications for submission to my Department. Selection of projects under the 2018 Scheme was by means of a competitive process. On 5th October, I announced details of successful projects under the 2018 Scheme. Full details are listed on my Department's website at https://drcd.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018-Town-and-Village-

Renewal-Scheme-Funding-1.pdf.

2018 Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme

Measure 1 of the 2018 Scheme relates to small scale maintenance/promotion and marketing projects. Applicants under this measure, in the main, were Local Development Companies. However in some counties where there were few applications from Local Development Companies, my Department accepted applications from Local Authorities. Details of successful Local Authority applications under the scheme are published on my Department's website: https://drcd.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/Copy-of-ORIS-2018-M1-Local-Authority-approvals-002.xlsx.

Local Authorities were eligible to submit up to four applications under Measure 2 - medium scale repair/upgrade and new trail development and one application under Measure 3 - large scale repair/upgrade and strategic trail development. No funding has been allocated under these measures in 2018 to date.

2017 Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme

In January 2018, I announced funding of €2.1 million for Measure 2 of the 2017 Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme. Local Authorities were permitted to submit up to 4 applications under this measure in 2017. Details of successful applications are published on my Department's website at https://drcd.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/Capture-1.png.

CLÁR 2018

Local Authorities were invited to submit up to 15 applications in total under the 2018 CLÁR programme for Support for Schools/Community Safety measures, and Support for play areas (including MUGAs). The remaining 2018 CLÁR measures were open to applications from bodies outside the Local Authorities. Detailed lists of successful applications are available on the CLÁR pages of my Department's website at: https://drcd.gov.ie/about/rural/clar/.

Local Improvement Scheme

The list of projects which each of the Local Authorities plan to undertake under the scheme this year were submitted to the Department and detailed information regarding 2018 roads selected for improvement works under the scheme are available on my Department's website at: http://drcd.gov.ie/about/rural/local-improvement-scheme/.

Walk Scheme

The cost of the Walks Scheme on an annual basis is in the region of €2.6 million. These costs include participant and materials payments, a contribution toward the cost of employment of 12 Rural Recreation Officers (RRO) who are employed by 12 Local Development Companies, and administration fees to 16 Local Development Companies.

The figures provided in the table for the cost of implementing the Walks Scheme for 2018 is indicative and based on the cost to the Department of the scheme in 2017. They include a contribution of €60,000 by Fáilte Ireland towards the cost of funding the 12 RROs.

The Local Authorities are not involved in the administration of the Walks Scheme.

COUNTY	Walks scheme Cost 2017
CLARE	€131,757
CORK	€819,139

COUNTY	Walks scheme Cost 2017
DONEGAL	€130,511
GALWAY	€96,966
KERRY	€371,442
KILKENNY	€82,471
LAOIS	€64,526
LEITRIM*	€2,097
LOUTH*	€47,727
MAYO	€288,178
OFFALY*	€19,381
ROSCOMMON	€192,621
SLIGO	€103,958
TIPPERARY	€173,848
WICKLOW	€101,979
Total	€2,626,601

* LDC without RRO or contribution from Fáilte Ireland.

Ministerial Communications

465. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if the Department has a policy regarding ministerial use of private email for Government business; and if so, if it will be published. [41529/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): My Department's ICT User Policy provides for access to the Department's e-mail system and its authorised internet services, as the only methods approved for the issue or publication of official Department information in electronic format. The policy is made available to all staff and is published on the Department's Intranet site.

Official email business, in my role as Minister, is conducted via Department and Oireachtas email accounts.

Official Engagements

466. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if he and-or officials in his Department attended the 2018 Ryder Cup; if so, the reason they attended; the days on which they attended; the officials they met from a Ryder Cup organisation or the European Tour; and the costs for each individual's attendance. [41541/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): Neither I nor any officials in my Department attended the 2018 Ryder Cup.

Carer's Benefit Eligibility

467. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to allow a transition period of four weeks for persons who are returning to work after spending a long period of time caring for a family member while in receipt of carer's benefit (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40661/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Through the commitments contained in both the Programme for Government and in the National Carers' Strategy, the Government recognises the crucial role that family carers play in Irish society and is fully committed to their support through a range of supports and services. The main income supports provided by my Department include Carer's Benefit, Carers Allowance, Domiciliary Care Allowance, and the Carer's Support Grant. Spending on these payments in 2018 is expected to amount to almost €1.2 billion.

Carer's Benefit (CB) is made to insured people who temporarily leave the workforce to care for a person(s) in need of full-time care and attention. The payment may be paid for 6 weeks after the death of the person being cared for after which the person may return to the workforce. The CB payment is an entitlement based on social insurance contributions and any extension to the post care period of continued payment would have to be considered in a budgetary context and in the context of the scheme's objectives.

Carer's Allowance (CA) does not require any social insurance contributions and is a means tested income support payment that draws from the social insurance fund in order to provide appropriate income support for those providing full time care. The principal conditions for receipt of the allowance are that full time care and attention is required and being provided and that the means test which applies is satisfied.

In Budget 2016, the period when CA can be paid following the death of a care recipient was extended from 6 to 12 weeks. The Department's Intreo service is available to carers who wish to consider returning to work after their caring responsibilities ends.

I hope this clarifies the issue for the Deputy.

Tax and Social Welfare Codes

468. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated number of staff reductions and savings that will be made following the introduction of the new computer-based employee PRSI return in January 2019; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40771/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): PRSI, along with tax and USC is collected by the Office of the Revenue Commissioners through the PAYE tax system.

From 1 January 2019 the Revenue Commissioners will launch their new PAYE Modernisation project. I understand that PAYE Modernisation has an objective of streamlining current business processes and reducing the administrative burden currently experienced by employers to meet their PAYE reporting obligations.

The main changes under the PAYE Modernisation project will affect how employers report payroll deductions to the Office of the Revenue Commissioners which collects PRSI on behalf of the Department. While the availability of more timely and accurate information will be of benefit to the Department is not anticipated at this point that there will be savings or staff reductions in the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection as a result.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Eligibility

469. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Pro-

tection if discriminatory elements (details supplied) of the domiciliary care allowance scheme will be addressed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40586/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA) is payable to whoever is considered to be the qualified person to receive the allowance. Section 186D of the SW Consolidation Act 2005 defines a qualified person as the person with whom the child normally resides and provides for the care of the child.

For DCA to be payable, a child must be resident with the qualified person for at least 5 days per week as per Section 140C of SI 162 of 2009. There is no provision under the legislation to support the splitting of DCA payment between two parents.

If the child is resident full-time in an institution, such as a hospital, DCA is not payable. However if the child comes home for not less than 2 days and not more than 4 days in any one week, then half rate payment can be made to the qualified person (ie. the person they would be considered as normally residing with if not in the institution). In this case payment is not split, but rather paid at a reduced rate to one person.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Benefit Applications Data

470. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the delays in the issuance of carer's benefit following a first application, in terms of days and weeks; the number of applicants awaiting the processing of a claim for carer's benefit; the number of days and weeks from application to award; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40611/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department is committed to providing a quality service to all its customers. This includes ensuring that applications are processed and that decisions on entitlement are made as quickly as possible.

Carer's benefit (CARB) is a payment made to insured people who leave the workforce to care for a child or an adult in need of full-time care and attention. An increased payment can be made where full-time care is being provided to two people.

At the end of August 2018, the average waiting time for new CARB applications was 11 weeks with 1,039 CARB applications awaiting decision.

Before a decision can be made on entitlement to CARB, a person has to show that they have the required level of PRSI contributions, that they have left full-time employment, that they are providing full-time care and attention and that the person being cared for has such a disability that they require full-time care and attention.

In general, social welfare schemes with a number of complex qualifying conditions can take longer to process. This is compounded if the documentary evidence provided at initial application stage is incomplete or insufficient; this is sometimes the case with CARB applications.

The Department is currently in the process of re-designing the CARB application form. This will allow carers to provide more information on the type and level of care they provide, with an aim to providing Deciding Officers with the information they need to expedite decisions on

entitlement.

Staff have recently been re-assigned within the CARB area to work on claims processing and this should lead to a reduction in processing times.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Benefit Applications

471. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when an application for carer's benefit will be assessed in respect of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40612/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): An application for carer's benefit was received from the person concerned on 19 July 2018.

The application was awarded to the person concerned with effect from 31 May 2018 when her carer's leave commenced. The first payment will issue to her nominated post office on 11 October 2018.

Arrears of benefit due from 31 May 2018 to 10 October 2018 will also issue to her post office on 11 October 2018.

The person concerned was notified on 3 October 2018 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Departmental Staff

472. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if assessments of resources are conducted in her Department in respect of staffing in order to adequately cover telephone inquiries, administrative workflows and volumes; if the areas in which resource gaps and deficiencies in service exist have been assessed; the way in which these impact on processing applications received; the way in which the definition of a reasonable response to an applicant is assessed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40613/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department is committed to providing a quality service to all its customers. This includes ensuring that applications are processed and that decisions on entitlement are made as quickly as possible.

The staffing needs for all areas within the Department are continuously reviewed, taking account of workloads, management priorities and the ongoing need to respond to new increasing demands in a wide range of services.

Operational processes, procedures and the organisation of work are continually reviewed to ensure that processing capability is maximised with specific targets set for responses within particular scheme area. This is to ensure that the best use is made of all available resources with a view to providing an efficient service to those who rely on the schemes operated by the Department.

Like all Government departments and agencies, my Department is required to operate within a staff ceiling figure and a commensurate administrative staffing budget, which for this Department has involved reductions in staff.

As part of the Department's ongoing programme of service modernisation, a range of initiatives aimed at streamlining the processing of claims, supported by modern technology, have been implemented in recent years.

Illness Benefit Applications

473. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a request for a full review of the benefit paid to a person (details supplied) from 2009 to 2011 will be expedited; if full benefit will continue to be paid to them during the appeal process; and the way in which a matter such as this can be pursued seven years later in view of the circumstances of the case and the fact that the local welfare office approved their working arrangements. [40619/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Correspondence issued to the customer in question on 28th June 2018 in response to a request for a review of an earlier decision. This correspondence outlined the detailed historical circumstances of the customer's Illness Benefit claim, advised them of the review decision and their associated right to appeal.

I understand that an appeal request was lodged with the Department's Appeals Office on 30th July 2018. That review is ongoing.

The customer in question is currently in receipt of an Illness Benefit payment.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Allowance Eligibility

474. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the correct level of jobseeker's allowance payable in the case of a person (details supplied); if all eligible supports in this instance are being offered to the person; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40625/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned is currently in receipt of a One Parent Family Payment which will terminate on 10/10/18 as she no longer fulfils the eligibility criteria for this payment support.

The person concerned attended Edenderry Intreo Centre on 4/10/18 to submit an application for a Jobseeker's Allowance. A letter was issued on 8/10/18 confirming that a Jobseeker Allowance payment at the full single rate has been awarded.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Back to Education Allowance Applications

475. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason a back to education allowance application by a person (details supplied) has

been refused; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40635/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned is currently in receipt of Illness Benefit (credits only) since 01 November 2017. He was in receipt of Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA) from 7 November 2017 until 12 September 2018. His SWA claim was suspended on 12 September as he commenced full time education and accordingly not entitled to SWA.

The person concerned did not make an application to participate on the Back to Education Allowance Scheme. However, for Illness Benefit customers to qualify for BTEA they must be in receipt of Illness Benefit / Illness Benefit (credits only) for a period of at least two years. The person concerned has been on Illness Benefit for less than 1 year.

The customer attended the CWS Clinic on 4 October 2018 where he submitted a letter from Limerick Institute of Technology confirming that he had withdrawn from the course. The suspension on his SWA payment has been lifted and backdated to 13 September 2018.

Literacy Programmes

476. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the involvement of her Department in tackling adult literacy; if a financial allocation is provided for same; if so, the way in which it is utilised; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40681/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department is committed to the provision of information to all of its customers in clear and easy to access formats, which adhere to the guidelines outlined by the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA). I fully recognise the barrier that literacy difficulties can cause for individuals who are trying to gain an understanding of and access to services and supports available. Therefore, we have recently awarded a one year contract to NALA for the provision of plain English writing, editing and training services to the Department. The estimated value of the contract is €100,000 (excluding VAT). Information on the range of schemes and services is published in plain English and we also provide information in alternative formats such as an Interpreters service, Braille and audio. A Sign Language Interpreter is also available where necessary.

The Intreo Centres assist individuals with their employment and income support services needs, and also provides a personalised service via my Department's Case Officers, including referrals to literacy courses locally in the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) which are free of charge. These courses are usually part-time and the customer remains on their social welfare payment.

My Departments aim in relation to work schemes such as Community Employment (CE) is to enhance the employability of disadvantaged and unemployed people, by providing work experience and training opportunities for them within their communities. Participants on CE, work to their own individual learning plan, setting personal learning and progression goals at a level that suits their aptitude and capacity. This is decided between the scheme CE supervisor and the participant. Facilitating further education including literacy skills, has the benefit of ensuring that participants take the initial steps in educational progression and, in time, achieve further qualifications and employment.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Pension Provisions

477. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if it is still her plan to issue payments under the new calculation method for the contributory pension in the first quarter of 2019; the legislative steps that still need to be taken to ensure that this comes into effect on schedule; if all persons potentially affected by this have been contacted; the number that have been contacted to date; the number outstanding that remain to be contacted; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40726/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): On 23 January last, the 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 the rate band changes 2012. 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 and both at a very advanced stage. In addition, my Department is currently finalising procedures and recruiting and assigning staff to process reviews of pensions.

It is estimated that 53,000 pensioners are affected by the rate band changes. However, over 76,000 pensioners (including 9,000 pensioners resident outside the State) will have their applications re-assessed under the TCA12, as there are people unaffected by the rate band changes who will be allowed benefit from the new scheme (notably, many with a yearly average of 40-47, who currently qualify for a 98% rate pension, but who may now qualify for a full rate pension).

My Department will be writing to impacted customers over the next two months to explain to them what is happening and how the process of review will work. 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 Allowance Review

478. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason her Department will not accept a form 11 self-assessment from the Revenue Commissioners in respect of a carer's allowance review for a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40739/18]

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.

Once claims are in payment, the Department periodically reviews them to ensure that there is continued entitlement.

In this case the means of the person concerned are being reviewed.

Means are any income belonging to the carer and their spouse, civil partner, or cohabitant, property, (except their own home) or an asset that could bring in money or provide them with an income, for example occupational pensions, or pensions or benefits from another country.

It is a condition for receipt of CA that every claimant shall furnish such certificates, documents, information and evidence as may be required for the purposes of deciding the claim and attends at such office or place as an officer may direct.

As the person concerned failed to satisfy to an officer of my Department as to the expenses incurred, authenticated profit and loss accounts were requested. To date the person concerned has not furnished these accounts.

The Revenue Form 11 is used for determining tax liability and is not suitable for the purpose of establishing means in respect of a social welfare payment.

The review is on-going and once complete, the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Payments

479. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of payments in respect of illness benefit recipients; the number of outstanding payments since the change to claim forms was introduced; if she is satisfied with the level of engagement and information provided to recipients during this process; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40746/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): In August 2018, my Department introduced a new claim form and medical certificate to replace the previous forms used for certification of the Department's Illness and Injury Benefit schemes. This change is part of a programme of modernisation in the Department.

Some GPs have continued to use the old forms after this changeover date. In order to facilitate the continued payment of Illness and Injury Benefits to our customers, the Department has, to date, continued to accept the old forms. While their continued use has caused delays to our processing times, my Department is doing everything possible to ensure that customers are paid as quickly as possible.

In this context, the Deputy should note that additional resources have been assigned to the Illness Benefit Unit to help clear any backlogs. There is currently a 2 day delay to claims received on old forms. There is no backlog in payments in respect of claims and certificates received in the new format.

The Department has a contract with GPs on the DEASP panel in respect of medical certification for illness and injury benefit and wrote to just under 3,500 contracting GPs in July 2018,

setting out the changes involved and will continue to communicate with all panel holders as the new process beds in.

In addition, the Department consulted with the Irish Medical Organization (IMO) - a long-standing representative body with a broad range of GPs in its membership. The Department will continue to consult with the IMO under our Framework Agreement on a range of issues including e-certification, closed certification and changes to forms. The IMO is the body that is recognised as holding the representative rights for GPs.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Appeals

480. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a disability allowance review will be expedited for a person (details supplied). [40749/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Based on the evidence supplied in support of this person's application, her application for disability allowance (DA) was disallowed on the grounds that the medical qualifying condition was not satisfied. The person in question was notified in writing of this decision on 08 August 2018.

They requested a review of the decision by a deciding officer (DO) and submitted additional medical evidence for consideration on 14 August 2018. This is being examined and when a decision is made she will be notified directly of the outcome.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Supplementary Welfare Allowance Eligibility

481. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) who has been working full-time here since 2016 has not been considered habitually resident in respect of their supplementary welfare application; if this decision will be reviewed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40772/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The customer made an application for Supplementary Welfare Allowance on 21 August 2018. The claim was disallowed as the customer was not habitually resident. A decision issued to the customer on 20 August 2018.

The applicant has requested an appeal which has been referred to an Appeals Office who will make a decision based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

Under Social Welfare legislation, decisions in relation to all aspects of claims are made by statutorily appointed Deciding Officers.

Each assistance claim receives a determination in relation to the Habitual Residence Condi-

tion in its own right and a decision is based on application of the legislation and guidelines to the particular individual circumstances of each case.

The determination of a person's habitual residence is made in accordance with five factors which are set out in legislation, as follows:

(a) the length and continuity of residence in the State or in any other particular country;

(b) the length and purpose of any absence from the State;

(c) the nature and pattern of the person's employment;

(d) the person's main centre of interest, and

(e) the future intentions of the person concerned as they appear from all the circumstances.

These five factors have been derived from European Court of Justice case law, and are generally sufficient to enable the deciding officer to determine whether a person's present circumstances in Ireland indicate a temporary visit or habitual residence.

One-Parent Family Payment Eligibility

482. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the financial savings made in each of the years 2015 to 2017 as a direct result of the introduction of changes to the eligibility and income thresholds for the one-parent family payments introduced in 2015; and the estimated saving for 2018. [40795/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The OFP scheme has played an important role in providing income support to lone parents since its introduction in 1997. However, in the past, this income support for lone parents was passive in nature, and involved limited engagement by the State employment services with OFP recipients.

Research has shown that being at work reduces the at-risk-of-poverty rate for lone parents by three-quarters, compared to those who do not work. This highlights that the best way to tackle poverty among lone parents is to assist them into employment. Access to activation supports is vital to achieve this objective and it is therefore imperative that my Department continues to engage with lone parents to assist them into employment.

The non-conditionality nature of the OFP payment, which was unique in Europe, coupled with its very long duration, has, over time, contributed to long-term social welfare dependency, and associated poverty, among many lone parents and their children. The reforms to the OFP scheme were introduced to address this issue. The reforms provide enhanced access to the Department's Intreo service to lone parents once their youngest child turns 7 years of age. Access to the Department's range of education and employment support services is essential to facilitate lone parents to progress into sustainable employment and financial independence.

The policy reforms implemented I believe, are in the best interests of both lone parents and their children, and of our aims to reduce child poverty.

The following table reflects the number of recipients and the expenditure on One-Parent Family Payment (OFP) from 2015 to 2017.

Year	No. of recipients on the scheme (year-end)	Weekly Personal Rate	Weekly Dependant Child Rate	Weekly Income Disregard	Expenditure on the scheme €m
2015	41,468	€188.00	€29.80	€90	€670.0
2016	40,317	€188.00	€29.80	€90	€500.7
2017	39,310	€193.00	€29.80	€110	€502.0

My Department will be spending an estimated €502 million on the OFP scheme in 2018. The OFP scheme currently supports over 39,000 recipients and almost 73,000 children.

The Department's level of expenditure on OFP is directly related to the number of claimants on the scheme (and the number of child dependants), so as the OFP numbers reduced due the reforms, the OFP expenditure reduced as well. However, many of those exiting the OFP scheme transferred to other social welfare schemes, such as Jobseeker's Transitional payment, Jobseeker's Allowance, Working Family Payment or Back to Work Family Dividend, so the expenditure on these schemes increased.

It is worth pointing out that the decreases in the income disregard for OFP that occurred from 2012 to 2014 were **unrelated** to the reforms of the OFP scheme, and were due to budgetary considerations. The lower income disregards meant that more of the earned income was taken into consideration as means, thereby impacting the overall income received by OFP recipients engaged in employment. The Government has been incrementally increasing the income disregard for OFP since Budget 2017, and it is currently set at €130. I will of course consider further increases in the context of the forthcoming Budget.

Carer's Allowance Applications

483. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision in respect of an application for carer's allowance by a person (details supplied) will be made; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40798/18]

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.

I confirm that my department received an application for CA from the person concerned on the 27 June 2018.

As the applicant has failed to answer a number of questions relating to her means or supplied supporting documentation, the matter was referred to a local social welfare inspector (SWI) on 3 October 2018 to assess the level of care being provided, assess means and confirm that all the conditions for receipt of carer's allowance are satisfied.

Once the SWI has reported, a decision will be made and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Payments

484. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social

Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 235 of 27 September 2018, if a payment level in the case of a person (details supplied) will be re-examined in view of an error; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40842/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): A payment increase to a Jobseekers payment for a Qualified Child is usually paid in circumstances here a child up to 18 years of age lives with the client. However, if a customer has been in receipt of a Jobseeker's Allowance payment for at least 156 days and their child/children is in full-time education, an increase for a Qualified Child (IQC) will be paid up to 22 years of age, or up to the end of the academic year in which the child reaches 22.

In this particular case, the person concerned has 2 dependent children less than 18 years of age for which they are in receipt of an additional payment for. However, if the person concerned has two other children who are in fulltime education, then there is no payment due for them as the person concerned has not been in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance for the qualifying conditions of 156 days. My Department will review the claim of the person concerned when it reaches 156 days duration in order to determine the eligibility of any additional children at that time. I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Eligibility

485. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) is not receiving a regular weekly payment of illness benefit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40859/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): In recent weeks, the Department experienced some delays following the introduction of a new system for Illness Benefit. The change is part of a programme of modernisation in the Department which took effect from Monday 6th August. Some GPs have continued to use the old forms after this changeover date which the Department has, to date, continued to accept in the interest of paying our customers.

The claim from the person concerned has been processed and he is in receipt of his full entitlement under the Illness Benefit Scheme and any/all arrears owing to him have been issued.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Eligibility

486. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if foster carers that apply for the carer's allowance are means tested on the foster carer's allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40860/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's allowance 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.

Foster care allowance is administered by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, which falls under the remit of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. Social welfare legislation provides that foster care allowances paid by Tusla are not taken into account in assessing the means in respect of any weekly social assistance payments; therefore it is not assessable as

means for carer's allowance.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Fuel Allowance Expenditure

487. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated full-year cost if the fuel allowance was increased by €2.50 per week; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40881/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The fuel allowance is a payment of €22.50 per week for 27 weeks (a total of €607.50 each year) from October to April, to over 368,000 low income households, at an estimated cost of €227 million in 2018. The purpose of this payment is to assist these households with their energy costs. The allowance represents a contribution towards the energy costs of a household. It is not intended to meet those costs in full. Only one allowance is paid per household.

My Department also pays an electricity or gas allowance under the house hold benefits scheme at an estimated cost of €182 million in 2018.

The estimated full year cost of the measure proposed by the Deputy would be €25.23 million.

Any decision to increase the fuel allowance payment would have budgetary consequences and would have to be considered in the context of budget negotiations.

In 2016 the Government launched a comprehensive Strategy to Combat Energy Poverty following extensive public consultation. This Strategy is spearheaded by the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment. It sets out the Government's commitment to protecting vulnerable households from energy poverty through a combination of supports, investment in schemes to improve energy efficiency, and energy efficiency awareness initiatives. One of the best ways to tackle fuel poverty in the long term is to improve the energy efficiency of the dwelling through proper building and household insulation. The Warmer Homes Scheme, administered by Sustainable Energy Authority Ireland, is designed to do that.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Pension Provisions

488. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to review the policy which excludes Irish citizens from building up class A contributions while working in the European Patent Office despite other Irish citizens in other European institutions being able to do so; her further plans to extend this allowance to the European Patent Office; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40904/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The issues raised by the Deputy relate to a ruling of the Court of Justice of the European Union in the *Gardella* case (Case C-233/12). This is a complicated ruling and its implications are being considered by the various Member States.

The position remains as set out in the reply provided in response to your previous question. The complexity of the Court of Justice ruling on the impact of employments with an interna-

tional organisation when calculating entitlement to social security old age pensions, requires extensive examination.

I understand that this case, which has implications for all Member States was discussed at the most recent meeting of the Administrative Commission For The Co-ordination of Social Security Systems in Brussels on 4th October 2018. The discussion was on the practical issues concerning the implementation of the Gardella ruling.

It is not possible at this stage to determine the outcome of the ongoing discussions. As previously indicated I will be in contact with the Deputy on resolution of this matter.

Jobseeker's Payments

489. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of sanctions and-or penalties applied to the benefits of jobseekers applied in each of the years 2010 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form. [40936/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Penalty rates were introduced in 2011 as a means of encouraging jobseekers to engage with activation measures and to co-operate with efforts of the Department to assist them in securing employment. The Department is committed, under Pathways to Work, to incentivise the take-up of activation opportunities, including implementing sanctions for failure to engage.

The legislation underpinning the application of penalty rates is provided for in the Social Welfare Act. Penalty rates can only be applied in specific circumstances and the decision to impose a penalty can only be made by a Deciding Officer of the Department. If dissatisfied with that decision it is open to the Jobseeker to appeal the decision to the Social Welfare Appeals Office.

Details of the numbers of penalty rates applied in the specific years and up to 9th September 2018 are listed in the table.

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018 to date	Total:
PR	-	359	1,519	3,395	5,325	6,743	10,867	16,451	11,169	55,828

Jobseeker's Payments

490. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of sanctions and-or penalties applied to jobseekers on foot of information supplied by JobPath providers since the commencement of the JobPath programme by year in tabular form. [40937/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): As the Deputy will be aware, JobPath is a service that supports people who are long-term unemployed to obtain and sustain paid employment. The service was launched in 2015 on a 'rolling basis' with referral numbers gradually increasing over time.

JobPath providers do not apply or recommend the application of a penalty rate of payment. They simply advise the Department if a jobseeker is failing to attend activation meetings without good cause. The application of penalty rates is entirely a matter for my Department and officials involved will take all relevant factors into account.

The process for sanctioning clients who do not engage with the JobPath activation process is exactly the same as the process for clients who fail to engage with the Department's other activation services provided by Intreo Centres, Local Employment Services and Job Clubs.

Reduced rates are only applied where a job seeker fails to engage as requested, and following at least two warnings, with the Department's employment services.

Between July 2015 and July 2018 179,000 jobseekers had commenced their engagement period with the service.

Up to the end of July 2018, 12,181 jobseekers had a penalty rate applied to their payment at some point during their engagement period with the JobPath service. The estimated breakdown per year is set out in the following table.

Jobseekers Engaged with JobPath By Year

Year	Number of Jobseekers Engaged with JobPath to have a penalty Rate applied.
2015	63
2016	1215
2017	5222
2018	5681

I trust this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

491. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of applicants for carer's allowance refused on an initial application and before a review or appeal of that decision took place in each year since 2010. [40938/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The information requested by the Deputy is detailed in the following tabular statement.

Carer's Allowance Claims disallowed at initial application:

2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Jan-August2018
6,972	5,227	6,827	9,881	7,078	7,920	11,144	8,599	5,856

Carer's Allowance Review

492. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of reviews and appeals of decisions to refuse carer's allowance that were successful with the application being subsequently approved in each year since 2010. [40939/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am advised by my Department that it does not hold records of the number of carer's allowance cases where the decision of the Deciding Officer is reviewed and subsequently overturned without recourse to appeal.

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.

The following table provides the details of the outcome of carer's allowance appeals for the years 2010 to 2017 and to the end of September 2018.

The appeals which had a favourable outcome for the appellant consist of appeals which were either allowed in full or in part by an Appeals Officer, or which were resolved by way of a revised decision in favour of the appellant by a Deciding Officer.

There are a number of reasons why a decision which was refused at first instance might be successful on appeal and it is not necessarily the case that the first decision was incorrect. It is often the case that new evidence is provided with an appeal and that, as a result, the original decision may be revised by the Deciding Officer or Designated Person. This was the case in 37.1% of favourable appeal outcomes (appeals in respect of all schemes) in 2016, 37.6% of such outcomes in 2017 and 31.9% of such outcomes to the end of September 2018.

Where the decision was not revised by the Department in light of the appeal contentions, further evidence is often provided by the appellant as the appeal process proceeds and in addition, the Appeals Officer may gain insights when they meet the appellant in person at oral hearing which may influence the outcome of the appeal.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Outcome of Carer's Allowance Appeals 2010– 2017

-	Appeals Finalised	Revised Deciding Officer Decisions	Appeals Allowed by Appeals Officers	Appeals Partly Allowed by Appeals Officers	Appeals Disallowed by Appeals Officers	Withdrawn
2010	2,219	695	464	56	939	65
2011	3,197	618	726	117	1,645	91
2012	2,057	452	651	135	786	33
2013	3,722	1,040	990	131	1,505	56
2014	3,386	463	1,240	177	1,451	55
2015	3,491	579	1,352	155	1,355	50
2016	3,624	815	1,375	145	1,237	52
2017	3,416	780	1,204	161	1,199	72
2018 (to 30/9/2018)	1,913	297	745	99	701	71

Illness Benefit Reform

493. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason her Department does not recognise and did not engage with an association (details supplied) on the roll-out of the new illness benefit form; if she will now engage with it in relation to same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40968/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): In August 2018, my Department introduced a new claim form and medical certificate to replace the previous forms used for certification of the Department's Illness and Injury Benefit schemes. The introduction of new forms is designed to improve the administration of the certification process and to make claim and payment procedures more efficient for everyone involved – patients, GPs, and the Department.

The Department has a contract with GPs on the DEASP panel in respect of medical certification for Illness and Injury Benefit and wrote to just under 3,500 contracting GPs, setting

out the changes involved and will continue to communicate with all panel holders as the new process beds in.

In addition, the Department consulted with the Irish Medical Organization (IMO) - a long-standing representative body with a broad range of GPs in its membership. The Department will continue to consult with the IMO under our Framework Agreement on a range of issues including e-certification, closed certification and changes to forms. The IMO as it is the body that is recognised as holding the representative rights for GPs.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals Status

494. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40969/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer on 27th September 2018, who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Supplementary Welfare Allowance Applications

495. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) has not been considered habitually resident in respect of their supplementary welfare application; if this decision will be appealed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40973/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The customer made an application for Supplementary Welfare Allowance on 21 August 2018. The claim was disallowed as the customer was not habitually resident. A decision issued to the customer on 20 August 2018.

The applicant has requested an appeal which has been referred to an Appeals Office who will make a decision based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

Under Social Welfare legislation, decisions in relation to all aspects of claims are made by statutorily appointed Deciding Officers.

Each assistance claim receives a determination in relation to the Habitual Residence Condi-

tion in its own right and a decision is based on application of the legislation and guidelines to the particular individual circumstances of each case.

The determination of a person's habitual residence is made in accordance with five factors which are set out in legislation, as follows:

(a) the length and continuity of residence in the State or in any other particular country;

(b) the length and purpose of any absence from the State;

(c) the nature and pattern of the person's employment;

(d) the person's main centre of interest, and

(e) the future intentions of the person concerned as they appear from all the circumstances.

These five factors have been derived from European Court of Justice case law, and are generally sufficient to enable the deciding officer to determine whether a person's present circumstances in Ireland indicate a temporary visit or habitual residence.

Social Welfare Appeals Waiting Times

496. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the waiting times for appealing decisions on State pension (contributory) applications; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41022/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): 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.

All claim decisions taken by the Department's Deciding Officers and Designated Persons are appealable to the Chief Appeals Officer. In any year about 85% of all claims are awarded by the Department and just 1% are appealed. Nevertheless, the Department is concerned that these cases are dealt with as quickly as possible.

The average processing time for state pension (contributory) appeals to the end of September 2018 was 48.9 weeks for appeals requiring an oral hearing and 40.7 weeks for appeals which were determined by means of a summary decision.

The average processing time for state pension (contributory) appeals is considerably longer than the overall average appeals processing times (30.5 weeks for oral appeals and 25.2 for summary appeals) due to the nature of the issues under appeal. In the majority of cases the question under appeal concerns the insurance contribution record of the person concerned, and appeal processing times often include a significant period of time spent on additional investigations by social welfare inspectors of the Department.

The time taken to process an appeal reflects a number of factors including that the appeals process is a quasi-judicial process with appeals officers being required to decide all appeals on a 'de-novo' basis. In addition, appeals decisions are themselves subject to review by the High Court and decisions have to be formally written up to quasi-judicial standards.

In addition, a number of new Appeals Officers have joined the Appeals Office over the past 12-18 months to replace staff leaving on retirement. Given the complexity of the appeals pro-

cess it takes some time for new staff to be trained up and develop expertise and this has led to somewhat longer processing times during this period. The Chief Appeals Officer has advised me that appeal processing times continue to be a priority for her office.

Finally, it should be noted that an appellant can claim supplementary welfare allowance pending the outcome of their appeal.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Support Grant

497. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a carer's support grant for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41033/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Carer's Support Grant is an annual payment made to carers by my Department.

This customer's application was received by my Department on 3rd October 2018. While some initial processing of the claim has already taken place, further details have been requested by the Deciding Officer. On receipt of the requested details, the Deciding Officer will review the claim and if no further clarification is required, a formal, written decision will be issued as soon as possible.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Delays

498. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she is satisfied that a person (details supplied) in County Wexford whose appeal for a carer's allowance was allowed in August 2018 must wait three to four months until their payment is issued; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41035/18]

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.

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

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

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

The person concerned was notified on 15 February 2018 of this decision, the reason for it and of his right of review and appeal.

My department were notified on 16 March 2018 that the person concerned had appealed this

decision to the Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO). A submission in support of the decision was forwarded to the SWAO on 21 March 2018.

As a result of an appeals officer's decision CA was awarded to the person concerned on 4 October 2018 with effect from 26 November 2017. The first payment will issue to her nominated bank account on 11 October 2018.

Arrears for the period 26 November 2017 to 10 October 2018 will also issue to the person concerned on 11 October 2018.

The person concerned was notified of the outcome on 4 October 2018.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

499. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a disability allowance payment will issue to a person (details supplies) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41053/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I confirm that my Department received an application for disability allowance from the person concerned on 25 September 2018. On completion of the necessary investigations on all aspects of the claim a decision will be made and they will be notified directly of the outcome.

The processing time for individual disability allowance claims may vary in accordance with their relative complexity in terms of the three main qualifying criteria, the person's circumstances and the information they provide in support of their claim.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Fuel Allowance Payments

500. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to increase the 2018 fuel allowance to reflect increases (details supplied) that are being passed onto consumers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41082/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The fuel allowance is a payment of €22.50 per week for 27 weeks (a total of €607.50 each year) from October to April, to over 368,000 low income households, at an estimated cost of €227 million in 2018. The purpose of this payment is to assist these households with their energy costs. The allowance represents a contribution towards the energy costs of a household. It is not intended to meet those costs in full. Only one allowance is paid per household.

My Department also pays an electricity or gas allowance under the house hold benefits scheme at an estimated cost of €182 million in 2018.

Any decision to increase the fuel allowance payment would have budgetary consequences and would have to be considered in the context of budget negotiations.

Under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme, exceptional needs payments may be made to help meet an essential, once-off cost which customers are unable to meet out of their

own resources and this may include exceptional heating costs.

In 2016 the Government launched a comprehensive Strategy to Combat Energy Poverty following extensive public consultation. This Strategy is spearheaded by the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment. It sets out the Government's commitment to protecting vulnerable households from energy poverty through a combination of supports, investment in schemes to improve energy efficiency, and energy efficiency awareness initiatives. One of the best ways to tackle fuel poverty in the long term is to improve the energy efficiency of the dwelling through proper building and household insulation. The Warmer Homes Scheme, administered by Sustainable Energy Authority Ireland, is designed to do that.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Fuel Allowance Eligibility

501. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason the fuel allowance has not been paid to persons in receipt of full contributory pension and in receipt of an illness benefit payment when their total income is less than the maximum means of €343.30; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41093/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Fuel allowance is a means-tested payment to assist householders on long-term social welfare payments towards the cost of their heating needs. It is a secondary payment, which increases the weekly rate of a primary payment.

The main eligibility conditions that apply to the fuel allowance scheme are that a person must -

- be in receipt of a qualifying payment, and

- satisfy a means test, and

- either be living alone, or living with their spouse/dependent children, or other persons with a qualifying payment.

Such qualifying payments do not include Social Insurance based payments that are classed as short-term payments (less than 12 months), e.g., Jobseeker's Benefit and Illness Benefit, which are not means tested payments.

If the Deputy has a particular case in mind he should provide the details to my officials who will examine it to ensure the person in question is claiming their full entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Employment Schemes Data

502. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of long-term unemployed (details supplied) eligible for community employment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41094/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The aim of Community Employment (CE) is to enhance the employability and mobility of disadvantaged and unemployed persons by providing work experience and training opportunities for

them within their communities. In addition it helps long-term unemployed people to re-enter the active workforce by breaking their experience of unemployment through a return to work routine.

CE projects are typically sponsored by groups wishing to benefit the local community, namely voluntary and community organisations and, to a lesser extent, public bodies involved in not-for-profit activities. Such projects provide a valuable service to local communities while at the same time providing training and educational opportunities to jobseekers. The Department's priority in supporting CE is having access to schemes that can provide job seekers and other vulnerable groups with good quality work experience and training qualifications to support their progression into employment.

In general, CE placements for entrants aged between 21 and 55 years are for one year. However, if a CE participant is working towards a major award, their time can be extended up to an additional 2 years to complete this award. Those aged 55 years and over can remain on CE for 3 consecutive years. Those aged 62 years and over can remain on CE up to State Pension age, subject to satisfactory performance on the scheme and to annual approval by the Department. The places allocated for these participants within each individual CE scheme are subject to limitation criteria.

The following table shows the number of long term unemployed people in the areas referred to who could potentially be eligible for CE placement. In determining eligibility regard is given to the duration of any previous participation on the programme which has a lifetime participation limit and eligibility is assessed on a case-by-case basis.

-	Under 35	From 36 - 55	From 56 - 66
Both Male & Female - Potential Eligible	27	22	14

Illness Benefit Payments

503. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an illness benefit payment for a person (details supplied); and the reason for the delay in relation to same. [41114/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Department administers the Illness Benefit (IB) scheme to those customers who cannot work because they are sick or ill and who satisfy certain PRSI conditions.

The above named customer exhausted her IB entitlement in July of this year and in order to requalify, she must have worked for a further 13 weeks.

Correspondence has issued to this customer for her employer to complete and return to the office and her entitlement will then be reassessed.

In the meantime, if this customer is encountering financial difficulties, she should contact her Community Welfare Service at her local Intreo Centre.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Payments

504. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 467 of 25 September 2018, when payments will issue to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41119/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): My Department have been dealing with the customer in question in relation to his Illness Benefit payments over the last few weeks.

We have reviewed payments that have issued and can confirm that the payment for the pay period 28/08/2018 to 03/09/2018 is showing as having been cashed on our system.

However, we note a further payment for the week 14/08/18 is showing as having issued but not yet cashed. In this regard, we have issued a Form of Indemnity via post (with a return addressed envelope) for this payment to the customer in order that we can reissue same.

Payment for this week has issued as per the usual arrangements.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Claims Processing

505. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason she did not consult with an organisation (details supplied) when the redesigned claim and medical certificate forms were introduced for use in the illness and injury benefit schemes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41230/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): In August 2018, my Department introduced a new claim form and medical certificate to replace the previous forms used for certification of the Department's Illness and Injury Benefit schemes. The introduction of new forms is designed to improve the administration of the certification process and to make claim and payment procedures more efficient for everyone involved –patients, GPs, and the Department.

The Department has a contract with GPs on the DEASP panel in respect of medical certification for Illness and Injury Benefit and wrote to just under 3,500 contracting GPs, setting out the changes involved and will continue to communicate with all panel holders as the new process beds in.

In addition, the Department consulted with the Irish Medical Organization (IMO) - a long-standing representative body with a broad range of GPs in its membership. The Department will continue to consult with the IMO under our Framework Agreement on a range of issues, including e-certification, closed certification and changes to forms.

The IMO is the representative GP body which is affiliated with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and has been for many years. The Department will continue to hold substantive discussions with the IMO as it is the body that is recognised as holding the representative rights for GPs.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Appeals

506. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a disability allowance appeal by a person (details supplied) will be expedited. [41246/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer, having fully considered all of the available evidence, has decided to allow the appeal of the person concerned by way of a summary decision. The person concerned has been notified of the Appeals Officer's decision.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs 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.

Ministerial Communications

507. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if there is a policy regarding ministerial use of private email for Government business in her Department; and if so, if it will be published. [41522/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Email usage in my Department is governed by an Electronic Communications and Internet Use Policy and Agreement which all staff must sign and acknowledge upon login to the Department's computers. Departmental users are prohibited from accessing their personal email i.e. gmail, hotmail and eircom web-based mail systems from within the Department.

There is no specific policy governing Ministerial use of private email.

Official Engagements

508. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she and-or officials in her Department attended the 2018 Ryder Cup; if so, the reason they attended; the days on which they attended; the officials they met from a Ryder Cup organisation or the European Tour; and the costs for each individual's attendance. [41535/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I did not attend the 2018 Ryder Cup nor did any of my Department's staff in their official capacity.

Social and Affordable Housing

509. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the circumstances that gave rise to the delays in construction of social houses at a company (details supplied); the way in which tenders were awarded to a firm that had significant debt; if a vulture fund is involved, the person or body from which that fund acquired the original debt; and the steps being taken to remedy the situation. [40622/18]

519. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the circumstances that gave rise to the delay in finishing social housing projects connected with a company (details supplied); his plans to finish these units; and if a vulture fund is involved in

the debt problems at the construction firm. [40621/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 509 and 519 together.

A number of social housing projects with the same main contractor have been impacted when the contractor ceased operation on site. I understand that since then, an interim examiner has been appointed in the case of the contractor concerned.

It is the local authorities and approved housing bodies who are the contracting parties in the cases of the social housing projects and they are therefore dealing directly with the issues arising from the main contractor discontinuing construction work on these sites and are taking the appropriate steps to re-tender the projects, where necessary, and have them completed as soon as possible.

Precautionary measures are always taken to safeguard public construction projects, including assessing a tenderer's financial and economic standing as part of procurement. Thereafter, public contracts should be actively and effectively managed and monitored by contracting authorities. Notwithstanding these steps, it can still happen that a contractor can stop operating giving rise to an unavoidable element of delay. This has happened before with social housing projects and the local authorities and housing associations have undertaken the appropriate steps that are needed in such situations and moved to complete the projects. I can confirm that funding support from my Department continues to be available for all the social housing projects impacted in this case, and it is the intention of the local authorities and approved housing bodies, with the support of my Department, to secure the full completion of the housing as soon as possible.

As Minister, I have no role in the commercial operations or decisions of the private company concerned and it would not be appropriate for me to comment on this aspect.

Land Development Agency

510. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the ownership of Columb Barracks will transfer in its entirety to the Land Development Agency or only the land planned for housing development in view of the recent announcement concerning Columb Barracks; his plans for all buildings on this site; and the level of engagement he has had with the community groups that are tenants. [40757/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The recently established Land Development Agency will act as a new commercial State body to actively manage the development of public land in a way that will make a major contribution to tackling the root causes of our current housing issues, including bringing about major new opportunities for additional social and affordable housing on public lands.

The Agency has a potentially very significant and wider role to play in not only addressing the pressures in the housing sector in the short to medium term but in the longer-term to enable the urban development objectives of the national planning framework to be realised.

The agency has access to an initial tranche of eight sites with significant potential to add a further pipeline of public sites that have near term delivery potential for 3,000 new homes and an additional potential for 7,000 new homes. Columb Barracks is one of the initial eight sites identified with potential to deliver a minimum of 250 homes.

I understand that discussions are in train between the agency and the Department of Defence with a view to agreeing a memorandum of understanding in relation to Columb Barracks, and that a feasibility study of the site will be undertaken by the agency. It is therefore premature to anticipate the detail of the proposals that may emerge.

Wind Energy Guidelines

511. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the new national guidelines for wind energy will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41077/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department is currently undertaking a focused review of the 2006 wind energy development guidelines. As part of the overall review, a strategic environmental assessment, SEA, is being undertaken on the revised guidelines before they come into effect, in accordance with the requirements of EU Directive 2001/24/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment, otherwise known as the SEA Directive.

SEA is a process by which environmental considerations are required to be fully integrated into the preparation of plans and programmes which act as frameworks for development consent, prior to their final adoption, with public consultation as part of that process. Following a tendering process, my Department appointed SEA experts in December 2017 to assist in this regard. It is expected that a public consultation on the revised draft guidelines, together with the comprehensive environmental report under the SEA process, will be commenced in the coming weeks, with the aim of issuing the finalised guidelines, following detailed analysis and consideration of the submissions and views received during the consultation phase, in early 2019.

When finalised, the revised Guidelines will be issued under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. Planning authorities and, where applicable, An Bord Pleanála must have regard to guidelines issued under section 28 in the performance of their functions generally under the planning Acts. In the meantime, the current 2006 wind energy development guidelines remain in force.

Regeneration Projects

512. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if it is his policy that complex regeneration projects will ensure that 60% of the development on public owned land will be for private sale at market prices; his views on the regeneration project in Inchicore, Dublin 8; if the project falls into the category of complex regeneration projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40583/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): To support the work of the newly established Land Development Agency, LDA, the Government has agreed new policies requiring that a minimum of 30% of public lands coming forward for redevelopment and/or disposal are to be reserved for affordable housing purposes, in addition to the statutory requirement for 10% social housing under the existing Part V provisions. The balance of 60% of the housing output of such projects will typically be for market housing.

These new policies will ensure more social housing delivery, more affordable housing delivery and more housing supply in general which is crucial in easing the prices and rents associated with new housing, while at the same time securing the delivery of sustainable and mixed

tenure communities in a balanced manner across the various social, affordable and market housing elements of the overall housing sector, all of which require enhanced supply.

As regards the regeneration project in Emmet Road, Inchicore, Dublin 8, this is separate from the projects being advanced by the LDA and is one of three significant sites being brought forward by Dublin City Council under its housing land initiative, HLI, the aim of which is to ensure the delivery of mixed-tenure homes in the Dublin City Council functional area. All three sites under the HLI are identified as strategic development and regeneration areas within the Dublin city development plan 2016-2022, and the plans for the development of the Emmet Road site predate the establishment of the Land Development Agency.

Mixed-tenure developments are an important policy objective of Rebuilding Ireland and uphold the principle of sustainable mixed communities, where housing needs are not subject to rigid segregation based on income levels. They also provide an opportunity to see major sites developed more quickly, and integrated into existing communities and areas. The Council has agreed the methodology for community consultation, as set out in the feasibility study presented through a community consultative forum.

While the final tenure mix on the Emmet Road site will be decided by Dublin City Council and informed by the detailed site development process, it will likely include 140 social housing homes, with the remaining 330 homes predominantly provided by the Council under cost rental arrangements. Under the cost rental model, minimising profit, land costs and other costs and securing very competitive EIB financing mean that much more affordable rents can be achieved than can be delivered through market arrangements.

Dublin City Council has appointed a dedicated project manager and a project team to drive the project forward. In addition to pre-existing consultative arrangements, the council is also facilitating the establishment of a special Inchicore regeneration consultative forum specifically for this project.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

513. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of households that were dropped from the housing list due to exceeding the income limits to qualify for social housing in the period pertaining to the statistics (details supplied); his plans to raise the qualifying income limit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40587/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Summary of Social Housing Assessment, SSHA, process requires all housing authorities to review those households who are on their housing list but who are not currently in receipt of housing support. This is to ensure that the details of the applicant households are up to date and accurate and that they remain eligible for, and in need of, social housing support in accordance with the criteria set down in the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 and associated social housing assessment regulations. As part of this assessment, all local authorities wrote to relevant households, including those in transitional and shared or emergency accommodation, if relevant, informing them of the assessment process and seeking updated information where necessary.

The net income eligibility limits for access to social housing support are set out in the following table:

	Single Person household	2 adults no children	Oneadult one child	Oneadult two children	Two adults 1 child	Two adults 2 children	Two adults 3 children	Two adults plus 4 or more children	Three adults plus 4 or more children
Band 1 €35,000	€35,000	€36,750	€35,875	€36,750	€37,625	€38,500	€39,375	€40,250	€42,000
Band 2 €30,000	€30,000	€31,500	€30,750	€31,500	€32,250	€33,000	€33,750	€34,500	€36,000
Band 3 €25,000	€25,000	€26,250	€25,625	€26,250	€26,875	€27,500	€28,125	€28,750	€30,000

On review, households found to exceed the limits on income eligibility grounds were removed from the list. Data supplied separately by the Housing Agency show that as part of the 2018 SSHA process 971 households were removed on income eligibility grounds. The oversight and management of these lists is a matter for the relevant housing authority in accordance with the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 and associated regulations.

As part of the broader social housing reform agenda, a review of income eligibility for social housing supports is underway. The Housing Agency is carrying out the detailed statistical work which will underpin this review on behalf of my Department. The review will obviously have regard to current initiatives being brought forward in terms of affordability and cost rental and will be completed when the impacts of these parallel initiatives have been considered.

Housing Assistance Payment

514. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if HAP and similar rental assistance payments for 2018 and for 2019 will be estimated in terms of State spending; his policy in terms of maximum expenditure in these categories; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40591/18]

515. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on whether HAP and similar payments provide no return for the State in that they are not adding to supply that is to either the national housing stock or State owned housing stock; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40593/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 514 and 515 together.

The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) provides fast, flexible housing support to households in an area of their choice. Individuals with a housing need, who in the past were reluctant to avail of full time work as they would lose their Rent Supplement support, can now move to HAP and avail of full-time work and retain their housing support, with an adjustment in their differential rent.

Budget 2018 increased the Exchequer funding for the HAP scheme by €149m to €301 million. This will allow for the continued support of existing HAP households and also enable the additional 17,000 households targeted under Rebuilding Ireland to be supported by HAP in 2018. A further €121m for HAP has been announced under Budget 2019. This will provide for the continued support of existing HAP households and also enable the additional 16,760 households targeted under Rebuilding Ireland to be supported by HAP in 2019, as well as supporting the roll-out of the HAP Place Finder Support Service across the country.

The Homeless HAP Place Finder Service is a targeted support for homeless households who are finding it difficult to secure HAP tenancies. The Place Finder Service has been successfully utilised by the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive (DRHE) across the Dublin local authorities since February 2015, with more than 3,000 households being supported by the Homeless HAP scheme at end Q2 2018.

The Homeless HAP Place Finder Service is now available to each of the 31 local authorities, with the options to pay deposits and advance rental payments for any households in emergency homeless accommodation, in order to secure accommodation via the HAP Scheme.

A critical focus of Rebuilding Ireland is to intensify the provision of long term local authority and Approved Housing Body (AHB) stock, particularly to accelerate new build activity. However, there is an urgent and immediate need to accommodate households, which cannot be met solely from owned stock. There were 71,858 households on local authority waiting lists as at 11 June 2018. The combination of targeted delivery under Rebuilding Ireland of 50,000 social housing homes under Build, Acquisition and Leasing schemes and 87,000 HAP and RAS supports, which will be funded by the Government out to 2021, offers both long term and flexible options to these individuals and families.

We are delivering on and in fact exceeding on both the 50,000 and the 87,000 targets. The targets under Rebuilding Ireland were carefully set against the reality of deliverables and by 2021 we will be housing more people through new social housing homes than through HAP.

At the end of Quarter 2 2018, over 37,750 tenancies were being supported by the HAP scheme, including over 9,000 additional households in 2018. I continue to keep the operation of HAP under review but I am currently satisfied with how the scheme is operating and I consider it to be a key vehicle for meeting current housing need and fulfilling the ambitious programme set out in Rebuilding Ireland.

European Court of Human Rights Rulings

516. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 530 of 25 September 2018, if his attention has been drawn to the fact that this timeline is different to that stated in correspondence to a person (details supplied) in September 2018; the correct timeline of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40595/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I refer to the reply to Parliamentary Question No. 530 of 25 September 2018.

As indicated in my previous reply, the working group referred to has concluded its deliberations and, taking account of the group's analysis and recommended outcome, my Department has been engaging with the European Commission on the matter with a view to issuing to planning authorities, by the end of this year, revisions to the 2005 rural housing guidelines that take account of the relevant ECJ judgment. It may be possible to finalise the guidelines earlier than that, subject to the completion of outstanding work.

Housing Adaptation Grant Eligibility

517. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason household income limits apply in respect of the disabled person's grant in cases

in which the disabled person is an adult and has no income other than disability allowance in view of the fact that it would be cheaper for the State to adapt the family home rather than house them separately as is the case. [40608/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The application of a household means test in relation to the housing adaptation grants for older people and people with a disability is designed to achieve fairness and value for money, while focusing funding on those with greatest needs.

For the purposes of the housing adaptation grant for people with a disability, household income is calculated as the annual gross income of the registered property owner together with all household members over 18, or over 23 if in full-time education, in the previous tax year. Certain income is not taken into account, or is disregarded, in calculating household income, including €5,000 for each member of the household up to 18 years, family income supplement, domiciliary care allowance and carer's benefit or carer's allowance, if paid in respect of the person to whom the grant application relates.

The detailed administration of the grants, including the assessment, approval and payment of individual grants to applicants, is the responsibility of the relevant local authority. Local authorities will endeavour to provide the appropriate solution in each situation.

Vacant Properties Data

518. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of vacant properties in the ownership of Tipperary County Council by district; the length of time the houses are vacant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40615/18]

528. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of vacant council houses in counties Mayo and Sligo on 20 September 2018; the number in towns and villages, respectively in the county; the details of rural council houses vacant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40768/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 518 and 528 together.

My Department does not keep data on the number of vacant or void local authority houses at a particular point in time. However, statistics in relation to social housing are compiled by the National Oversight and Audit Commission, NOAC, in its annual reports on Performance Indicators in Local Authorities. These statistics are set out by local authority and include the percentage of total local authority dwellings that were vacant, with the most recent report relating to 2017. This report is available on the NOAC website at the following link: *http://noac.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/NOAC-Performance-Indicators-Report-2017.pdf.*

Question No. 519 answered with Question No. 509.

Emergency Accommodation Data

520. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of beds in homeless accommodation; if they are supported temporary accommodation, temporary emergency accommodation or other available specifically for young persons leaving care in each of the years 2015 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will

make a statement on the matter. [40663/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of homeless services, including accommodation, rests with individual housing authorities. The matter raised by the Deputy is an operational issue in the day-to-day delivery of services and is a matter for the relevant housing authorities.

Responsibility for young people leaving care falls under the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs.

Emergency Accommodation Data

521. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of beds in homeless accommodation; if they are supported temporary accommodation, temporary emergency accommodation or other available specifically for persons leaving prison in each of the years 2015 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40665/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of homeless services, including accommodation, rests with individual housing authorities. The matter raised by the Deputy is an operational issue in the day-to-day delivery of services and is a matter for the relevant housing authorities.

The policy in relation to discharges from prison is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality.

Emergency Accommodation Data

522. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of beds in homeless accommodation; if they are supported temporary accommodation, temporary emergency accommodation or other available specifically for homeless persons leaving hospital in each of the years 2015 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40666/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of homeless services, including accommodation, rests with individual housing authorities. The matter raised by the Deputy is an operational issue in the day-to-day delivery of services and is a matter for the relevant housing authorities.

Policy in relation to hospital discharges is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Health.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

523. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of one-off rural social houses built in each local authority area in each of the years 2007 to 2017. [40713/18]

524. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the estimated number of one-off rural social houses which will be built in each local authority area in 2018. [40714/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 523 and 524 together.

Data on the number of social homes delivered by local authorities is published on my Department's website at the following link: *http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordble/overall-social-housing-provision.* This data includes the number of properties constructed, purchased and leased by all local authorities in previous years.

In addition, my Department also publishes quarterly information on the pipeline of new social housing construction that is currently in place, with the report covering the period to end Quarter 2 of 2018 being available at the following link: *http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-latest-social-housing-construction-report/.* This sets out the size and location of the social housing construction projects in development under Rebuilding Ireland across all local authority areas.

These information sources do not separately identify those developments that are single rural dwellings. It is the local authorities that are responsible for the identification of the social housing need in their areas and for the development of appropriate responses to meet the need identified. There is no requirement for local authorities to deliver a precise number of single rural dwellings, as it is a matter for them to prioritise projects to meet their overall housing need.

I am pleased to see the progress being made on new social housing projects, as evident in the latest quarterly social housing construction report, building on what has been already delivered, but I am keen that all local authorities further accelerate their programmes and I have assured them that the necessary funding is available to support their work in this regard.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

525. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if local authorities will be funded to build social housing for those on the housing waiting list that can provide a site from a family member or friend to build on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40715/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Local authorities are funded to deliver social housing in a number of ways but there is no requirement for local authorities to deliver social houses on sites provided by an applicant approved for social housing support, as it is a matter for them to select and prioritise projects to meet their overall housing need. It is the local authorities that are responsible for the identification of the social housing need in their areas and for the development of appropriate responses to meet the need identified.

Local authorities have a number of options available to them in meeting social housing needs, and these include the provision of low cost sites to persons qualified for social housing

support on which they would build their own homes. Another option which could be utilised by a local authority, where it considers it appropriate, is the transfer of a site from a person qualified for social housing to the local authority, and the building of a social house on the site by the local authority, to be tenanted by the person who transferred the site.

Environmental Impact Assessments

526. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if a ministerial order under section 160 that an environmental impact assessment which would be mandatory under the codified EIA Directive 2011/92/EU is not required in view of the European Court of Justice judgment in Case C-215/06 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40737/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Section 160 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended (the Act), relating to unauthorised development, does not provide for a ministerial order in relation to environmental impact assessment. Section 30 of the Act specifically precludes the Minister from exercising any power or control in relation to any particular case with which a planning authority or An Bord Pleanála is or may be concerned.

Water Pollution

527. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to an instance of water contamination below ground level in an area (details supplied); if the mater has been investigated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40752/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Since 1 January 2014, Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of water services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local levels. While local authorities have a general responsibility for the monitoring, management and improvement of water quality, the Environmental Protection Agency, EPA, is the supervisory authority for public water supplies. The EPA is also the statutory body for investigating complaints of pollution and for the enforcement, both directly and through oversight of local authorities, of environmental legislation in Ireland.

The procedures to be followed where there is non-compliance with the parametric values for drinking water, and the roles of the water supplier, the EPA and the Health Services Executive, HSE, are set out in the European Union (Drinking Water) Regulations 2014, as amended, a copy of which is available in the Oireachtas library.

While my attention has not been drawn to this reported instance of water contamination, neither I nor my Department have any direct role in monitoring or supervising the delivery of water services or any pollution incidents arising therefrom.

Question No. 528 answered with Question No. 518.

Weather Events Expenditure

529. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Govern-

ment the allocation of emergency funding provided for Clane, County Kildare following the significant snowfall in February and March 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40777/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Since 2009, my Department has made financial support available to assist local authorities in meeting the costs of clean-up and necessary immediate works associated with the response to significant severe weather emergency events. This is in recognition of the exceptional nature of activities carried out by local authorities in responding to these types of emergencies and the fact that the costs of these un-programmed activities cannot be met from within existing resources.

In relation to the severe cold weather and snow that caused widespread disruption in many parts of the country in February and March this year, my Department has recouped a total of €9.398 million to local authorities for their response and clean-up activities including a total of €510,019 to Kildare County Council. These payments were made on a local authority basis on foot of claims for recoupment submitted to my Department. The amount of this funding that relates specifically to response and clean-up activities in Clane is a matter for Kildare County Council.

Mortgage to Rent Scheme

530. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the detail of the recent changes to the mortgage to rent scheme. [40785/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Following a Review of the Mortgage to Rent (MTR) Scheme, published on 8 February 2017, a range of amendments to the eligibility criteria and administration of the MTR scheme came into effect to enable more properties to qualify and to make the scheme more flexible and accessible to borrowers. The Review, available at the following link: http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/changes-in-mortgage-to-rent-scheme/, explored the impediments to participation in the scheme and recommended a number of actions to make the scheme work better for borrowers.

To increase borrowers' awareness and understanding of MTR a new dedicated mortgage to rent website, www.mortgagetorent.ie, has been developed by my Department together with the Housing Agency, with input from the Abhaile Service and the Insolvency Service of Ireland. The website, which went live in June 2018, complements the other improvements that have been made to the scheme following the 2017 Review.

My Department and the Housing Agency are working with all stakeholders to ensure that the actions set out in the Review are being effectively implemented to benefit a greater number of households.

The MTR Review, taking account of capacity within the Approved Housing Body sector, also recommended that alternative funding options, including the off-balance sheet potential of private institutional investment, be explored in order to allow the MTR scheme to deliver at scale. An Expressions of Interest Request issued in 2017 inviting parties from the private sector to express their interest in participating in a new alternatively funded long-term MTR lease model.

The outcome from the EOI process is that a new MTR process was announced in July 2018 with Home For Life Ltd. as the participant from the private sector. Under this pilot model, Home For Life Ltd. will acquire properties from lenders subsequent to their voluntary surrender

by eligible borrowers who are in mortgage arrears, and who require long-term State assistance in meeting their housing needs. Home For Life will simultaneously enter into long-term lease arrangements with the local authorities in whose area the properties are situated. The local authority then sub-leases the property to the previous borrower under a tenancy agreement with the borrower becoming a social housing tenant. This enables the borrower to remain living in their home paying an affordable rent to their local authority. It is expected that Home for Life Ltd. will deliver a minimum of 50 cases under this alternatively funded long-term MTR lease model in 2018.

In all scenarios, my Department and the Housing Agency are focused on meeting the long-term housing needs of the greatest number of households in unsustainable mortgage arrears.

Home Loan Scheme

531. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of applicants for the Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme; the number who have been granted the requested loan; and the counties in which these applicants reside, in tabular form. [40920/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): As with the previous local authority home loan offerings, loan applications under the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan are made directly to the local authority in whose area the property proposed for purchase is situated. My Department does not directly collect information on the number of loan applications received by each local authority.

However, as is currently the case, my Department will continue to publish information on the overall number and value of (i) local authority loan approvals and (ii) local authority loan drawdowns. Information up to Q4 2017 is available on the Department's website at the following link: *http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/house-prices-loans-and-profile-borrowers/local-authority-loan-activity*, and this information is updated on a quarterly basis as additional data is compiled.

In addition, the Housing Agency provides a central support service which assesses loan applications that are made to the local authorities and makes recommendations to the authorities as to whether loans should be offered to applicants. I have asked the Agency to centrally compile figures on the numbers of applications that it has assessed and the most recent figures, as at the end of September, indicate that the Agency had received a total of 2,933 applications for assessment from local authorities.

Of the 2,933 applications received, 2,354 were deemed to be valid. Of these valid applications, 2,222 had been assessed and 1,134 of these (51%) had been recommended for approval. A breakdown by local authority of the 1,134 applications recommended for approval is set out in the following table.

Local Authority	Applications Recommended to Approve by HA
Carlow County Council	15
Cavan County Council	1
Clare County Council	14
Cork City Council	37
Cork County Council	93
Donegal County Council	13
Dublin City Council	163

Local Authority	Applications Recommended to Approve by HA
Dun Laoghaire–Rathdown County Council	33
Fingal County Council	156
Galway City Council	22
Galway County Council	32
Kerry County Council	26
Kildare County Council	72
Kilkenny County Council	11
Laois County Council	27
Leitrim County Council	2
Limerick City & County	28
Longford County Council	12
Louth County Council	19
Mayo County Council	13
Meath County Council	101
Monaghan County Council	2
Offaly County Council	10
Roscommon County Council	11
Sligo County Council	16
South Dublin County Council	84
Tipperary County Council	23
Waterford City & County Council	10
Westmeath County Council	11
Wexford County Council	33
Wicklow County Council	44
Total	1,134

Each local authority must have in place a credit committee and it is a matter for the committee to make the decision on applications for loans, in accordance with the regulations, having regard to the recommendations made by the Housing Agency.

Land Development Agency

532. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to in Parliamentary Question No. 37 of 27 September 2018, the 30 sites referred to as projects supported by the local infrastructure housing activation fund by county, in tabular form. [40921/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund is designed to activate housing supply by putting in place the enabling public infrastructure necessary to ensure that large scale development can take place on key sites in urban areas of high housing demand.

Final approval was given for 30 projects under LIHAF in 2017 and early 2018, and these projects will stimulate development of approximately 20,000 housing units across 14 local authorities, at a cost of approximately €195 million, of which approximately 75% will be provided from Exchequer funding. A table with details of these 30 projects, including the infrastructure to be built and the funding amounts, was published in March, 2018 and is available on the Rebuilding Ireland website at http://rebuildingireland.ie/lihaf/.

Central Statistics Office Remit

533. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the responsibility will be given to the Central Statistics Office for housing output data, homeless and housing figures and other statistics in this sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40933/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department's Statistics and Data Analytics Unit (SDAU) recently collaborated with the Central Statistics Office (CSO) and ESB Networks to significantly enhance the production of statistics in the area of housing completions. In relation to other output statistics, the SDAU and the relevant business units work on the compilation of social housing output statistics using data supplied to my Department by the Local Authorities on a periodic basis. The production of quarterly output statistics involves a significant collaboration and reconciliation of data sources across a wide number of my Department's business units in order to produce statistics for publication in a timely fashion. The SDAU can, and will, engage with the CSO in respect of housing data on an ongoing basis and is represented on the CSO's Housing Data Group; likewise, the CSO is represented on my Department's Housing Data Analytics Group. This collaborative working arrangement is very beneficial to both organisations, particularly in respect of the transfer of knowledge and information.

As regards homelessness statistics, my Department currently publishes data on a monthly basis on the number of homeless persons accommodated in emergency accommodation funded and overseen by housing authorities. These reports are based on data provided by housing authorities, produced through the Pathway Accommodation & Support System (PASS). The reports are collated on a regional basis. While I have indicated the need to improve the current reporting system, and see great value in securing the advice and expertise of the CSO in that regard, there are no plans to transfer responsibility for the production of these reports to the CSO.

Housing Data

534. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the average and total cost of non-departmental funded Part V units in 2017; if the units were new builds or existing on-site or off site; the funding stream that purchased them; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40941/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Agreement on Part V arrangements is a matter for local authorities. The current options available to local authorities for Part V delivery are:

- the transfer of ownership of land, subject to the planning permission application, to a local authority for the provision of social housing remains the default option as is currently the case. The land option must be acceptable to the local authority, as well as the developer;

- the building and transfer of ownership to the local authority, or persons nominated, of completed social housing units on the site subject to the planning permission;

- the transfer of ownership to the local authority, or persons nominated, of completed social housing units on other land;

- the Part V obligation can now be fulfilled by developers through long term leasing of properties; and

- a combination of the options above.

In relation to Part V units that are not funded through my Department's Schemes, my Department only collects data in relation to the number of units and does not hold information on the cost of the units involved. Published statistical information is available at the following link:

www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/affordable-housing/affordable-housing-and-part-v-statistics.

Housing Data

535. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the Rebuilding Ireland social housing targets for 2018 to 2021 by local authority for build and acquisition but excluding leasing, in tabular form. [40943/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The overall targets under Rebuilding Ireland for social housing build and acquisition, over the period 2018-2021, as published, are as follows:

	2018	2019	2020	2021
Build	4,969	6,385	7,716	8,907
Acquisition	900	1,025	800	800

The targets are broken down by local authority for 2018 only at present, details of which can be accessed on the Rebuilding Ireland website at: http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-social-housing-delivery-targets-for-local-authorities-2018-2021/.

Targets are reviewed annually and any increased delivery arising from the 2019 budgetary process will be reflected in the targets to be delivered from 2019 onwards.

Housing Data

536. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of leased social housing units under the SCHEP and related programmes for the most recent date available by local authority, in tabular form. [40944/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SHCEP) was introduced in February 2009. Since then the programme has been expanded on a number of occasions to provide for new types of supply and to involve a greater range of agencies and bodies in providing accommodation. SHCEP supports the delivery of social housing by providing financial support to local authorities for the long term leasing of houses and apartments from private owners, developers and Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs). Properties made available under the programme are used to accommodate households from local authority waiting lists. Leased properties are allocated to tenants in accordance with the relevant local authority's allocation scheme.

Dwellings under the scheme come from a number of different sources including private owners, Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs), Part V and the NAMA Special Purpose Vehicle (NARPS).

The following table sets out the number of dwellings supported under SHCEP by Local

Authority at end Q2 2018.

Table: Dwellings supported under SHCEP at end Q2 2018.

Local Authority	No. of Dwellings supported under SHCEP (End Q2 2018)
Carlow County Council	192
Cavan County Council	60
Clare County Council	420
Cork City Council	284
Cork County Council	1,118
Donegal County Council	292
Dublin City Council	1,415
Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council	327
Fingal County Council	756
Galway City Council	422
Galway County Council	116
Kerry County Council	293
Kildare County Council	487
Kilkenny County Council	131
Laois County Council	254
Leitrim County Council	16
Limerick City & County Council	134
Longford County Council	110
Louth County Council	540
Mayo County Council	219
Meath County Council	372
Monaghan County Council	32
Offaly County Council	303
Roscommon County Council	10
Sligo County Council	55
South Dublin County Council	935
Tipperary County Council	444
Waterford City & County Council	251
Westmeath County Council	351
Wexford County Council	283
Wicklow County Council	72
Total	10,694

Housing Data

537. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of social housing units that will be made available to Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council as a result of a purchase by a company (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40950/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I am informed by Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council that the Part V obligation for this site has already been discharged with homes already provided in other locations.

Urban Renewal Schemes

538. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the details of the €972 million spent on the Ballymun regeneration project; and his views on whether the regeneration is a success. [40966/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Ballymun regeneration project spanned almost 20 years, with Departmental funding requirements first coming into play in 1999.

The substantial programme, which included 24 projects, is now complete. Approximately €972 million was spent on the programme, €775.3 million of which was recouped by my Department. Ballymun is by far the largest regeneration project ever undertaken in the country and the project was largely completed by the end of 2013. Since construction started in 2000, this significant investment resulted in almost 2,000 new replacement homes being constructed for residents of the original flat blocks and an additional 1,350 homes in the area being provided via private sector investment.

In addition, the programme has provided state of the art community facilities, such as the Axis theatre, and invested in neighbourhood centres to improve services. In recent years the programme has focused on improving the area's environmental performance with various green initiatives, new parks and playing pitches. Enterprise and employment generation has focused on the main street and retail parks with many new employment opportunities opening up for the residents.

My Department's oversight of the regeneration projects at this location was concerned with general progress on the overall programme and it continually liaised with Dublin City Council and Ballymun Regeneration Limited on the strategic approach and general phasing of works. This ensured that the project progressed on a sustainable basis, particularly having regard to general budgetary constraints and with a view to achieving its original intended outcomes for the community in a timely, efficient and cost-effective manner.

It must be noted that a regeneration project goes beyond mere bricks and mortar. In order to be successful and sustainable in the long term, a regeneration project requires the re-building of a community and a strengthening of community bonds. Through a combination of providing state of the art community facilities, large scale housing solutions and encouraging local enterprise and employment I believe that the Ballymun regeneration project has and will continue to prove to be a success.

NAMA Social Housing Provision

539. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to engage with Dublin City Council and NAMA, further to the motion passed recently at the council to transfer a site (details supplied) into State ownership to build cost rental and affordable housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41005/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I am advised that the site to which the Deputy refers is not owned by NAMA, rather the site is controlled by a receiver and NAMA is the secured creditor. I have no role or powers in relation to NAMA secured loans or to direct NAMA to adopt a particular course of action.

However, I do understand that Dublin City Council are currently having discussions with

NAMA in relation to the potential re-development of this land which is adjacent to Dublin City Council owned land at St. Teresa's Gardens. My Department is actively engaged with the City Council on the delivery of an ambitious social and affordable housing programme. In that context, my Department will examine any proposals that the Council may make following its engagement with NAMA.

Property Registration

540. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will address a matter regarding a mapping error in relation to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41006/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): As previously outlined in the replies to Parliamentary Questions Nos 578 of 26 June 2018 and 1284 of 12 June 2018, the Property Registration Authority remains responsible for dealing with the matter concerned. However, it is not in a position to progress an application for compensation until such time as it receives the necessary advice from the Chief State Solicitor's Office.

Rent Pressure Zones

541. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the changes he plans to make to the rules underpinning and operation of the rent pressure zones arising from the Review of Rent Predictability Measure - Final Report. [41011/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department has conducted a review of the Rent Predictability Measure on the basis of the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) rent data and a public consultation on the operation of the Rent Pressure Zones (RPZs). Arising from the review findings, I announced a number of measures to further strengthen the effectiveness of the rent setting and rent review laws, including the implementation of a change plan to develop and strengthen the role of the RTB, particularly with regard to enforcement.

These measures include the intention to sanction a landlord who increases rent in contravention of the legislation and to provide the RTB with the necessary powers and resources to protect tenants from illegal rent increases. These changes will strengthen the impact of the Rent Predictability Measure and should contribute to a further slowing in the growth in rents, in tandem with increasing supply.

The Government approved the priority drafting of the Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Bill on 17 April 2018 and the Bill is currently being drafted as a priority by the Office of Parliamentary Counsel.

The Bill will further strengthen the effectiveness of the rent setting and rent review laws by empowering the RTB to:

- investigate any contravention of the law around rent limits (4% per annum) in RPZs and to take enforcement action, if necessary, including the imposition of sanctions on landlords in breach; and

- initiate an investigation without the need for a complaint to be made.

These proposed powers for the RTB are also a crucial first step in expanding the role and

function of the RTB as part of a multi-annual change management programme to proactively enforce the law within the rental sector. The Bill is expected to be published shortly.

Commemorative Medals

542. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to award a medal to those members of Dublin Fire Brigade and Ambulance Service who took part in the 1916 centenary celebrations; if a committee is considering this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41037/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The provision of fire services in local authority areas is a statutory function of the individual fire authorities under the provisions of the Fire Services Acts, 1981 and 2003. My Department supports the fire authorities through setting general policy and through a range of service development programmes.

The issuing of 1916 – 2016 Commemorative medals was a commitment in 'A Programme for Partnership Government' for the Defence Forces, and therefore did not include staff in local authority Fire Services. However, my Department is commissioning medals in recognition of the role played by staff working in the Fire Services in relation to the 1916 commemorations. It is envisaged that all Fire Services staff serving in 2016 will be eligible to receive the medal.

A tender process is being undertaken as part of procurement and my Department will be in contact with all Fire Authorities in relation to this matter directly.

Housing Adaptation Grant

543. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the waiting list for the housing adaptation grant and housing aid for older people scheme in counties Cavan and Monaghan in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41045/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The detailed administration of the Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability, including the assessment, approval and prioritisation of grants to applicants under the various grant measures, is the responsibility of the local authorities.

My Department does not hold information in relation to waiting lists of individual local authorities. This information may be available directly from the local authorities.

Housing Data

544. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of rapid build housing units that have been constructed to date and occupied; the number of additional units expected to be completed before the end of 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41083/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department is working closely with all local authorities in relation to increasing and accelerating the delivery of a range of social housing programmes and supports, including through the

use of rapid build methodologies.

287 homes have been delivered using rapid build technology up to the end of Q2 this year, with a further 132 units across 6 schemes scheduled for completion before the end of the year. An additional 26 rapid build projects, set to yield a further 686 new social housing homes, are also being advanced.

Local authorities have been advised that rapid build approaches should increasingly become the norm in terms of delivering social housing projects and my Department will continue to engage with local authorities to this end.

In relation to the tenanting and allocation of social housing support to qualifying households, this is a matter for the housing authority concerned.

Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund

545. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the requests for funding submitted by each local authority and the drawdown of funding to each authority under the LIHAF scheme to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41084/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): As a key initiative of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF) is designed to fund the provision of public off-site infrastructure to relieve critical infrastructure blockages and enable housing developments to be built on key sites at scale.

Funding of €200 million was originally provided under LIHAF, of which €150 million is funded by the Exchequer and local authorities fund €50 million. 30 projects received final approval at a total cost of €195.71 million, of which €146.69 million will be funded by the Exchequer and local authorities will fund the balance.

The successful project cycle requires careful planning at the initial stage. The design, planning and procurement phases are not especially costly in terms of the scale of an overall project, with the bulk of expenditure arising during the construction phase. Thus far, most projects have been at the design and planning stages and this is reflected in the level of funding drawdowns to date. As the projects progress to construction, site activity and drawdowns will significantly escalate and it is expected that up to a third of the projects will be at construction phase by end 2018. Funding for LIHAF is ring-fenced within the overall housing budget and will be available for local authorities to draw down over the lifetime of the projects.

The following table details drawdown for 2017 and the first two quarters of 2018. My Department recently invited local authorities to submit claims in respect of quarter three of 2018.

Local Authority	Project name	Drawdown of LIHAF funding to end Q2 2018 €
Clare	Claureen, Ennis	41,142
Cork City	Old Whitechurch Road	28,201
Cork City	South Docks	363,495
Cork County	Carrigaline	13,837
Cork County	Glanmire	86,441
Cork County	Midleton	34,718

Local Authority	Project name	Drawdown of LIHAF funding to end Q2 2018 €
Dublin City	Belmayne and Clongriffin	47,657
Dublin City	Dodder Bridge	126,463
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown	Cherrywood	68,280
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown	Clay Farm	0
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown	Woodbrook Shanganagh	0
Fingal	Baldoyle Stapolin	84,348
Fingal	Donabate Distributor Road	1,248,869
Fingal	Oldtown Mooretown	0
Kildare	Naas	39,454
Kildare	Maynooth	22,563
Kildare	Sallins	645,584
Kilkenny	Ferrybank	0
Kilkenny	Western Environs	101,991
Limerick	Mungret	112,886
Louth	Mount Avenue, Dundalk	0
Louth	Newtown, Drogheda	0
Meath	Farganstown, Navan	53,531
Meath	Ratoath	82,613
South Dublin	Adamstown SDZ	0
South Dublin	Clonburris SDZ	0
South Dublin	Kilcarbery (Corkagh Grange)	28,825
Waterford	Gracedieu	52,233
Waterford	Kilbarry	94,590
Westmeath	Brawny Road, Athlone	0

Further details on all of the above projects are available at *www.rebuildingireland.ie/LIHAF*.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

546. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 627 of 2 October 2018, the schedule of the quarterly meetings with Wicklow, Kildare, Meath and all Dublin local authorities since the beginning of 2018 and those planned until the end of 2019; the schedule of each project discussed at each of those quarterly meetings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41117/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The meetings between my Department's Architectural and QS Advisors, to review progress and examine new proposals on social housing, are happening quarterly with all local authorities. In respect of the local authorities referred to in the question, the quarterly schedule for 2018 is outlined in the following table. A quarterly meeting schedule will be maintained going forward into 2019 and beyond.

Local Authority	Meeting Date Q1 2018	Meeting Date Q2 2018 (or 2nd meeting)	Meeting Date Q3 2018 (or 3rd meeting)	Meeting Date Q4 2018 (or 4th meeting)
Dublin City Council	23 January	21 March	24 May	17 October

Local Authority	Meeting Date Q1 2018	Meeting Date Q2 2018 (or 2nd meeting)	Meeting Date Q3 2018 (or 3rd meeting)	Meeting Date Q4 2018 (or 4th meeting)
Dun Laoghaire – Rathdown County Council	21 February	16 May	20 September	21 November (tbc)
Fingal County Council	30January	26 April	12 July	10 October
South Dublin County Council	18 January	25 April	12 July	19 October
Kildare County Council	10 January	10 April	4 July	3 October
Meath County Council	17 January	24 April	18 July	17 October
Wicklow County Council	11 January	12 March	8 June	27 September

These meetings review the wide range of social housing projects that are underway or planned across the local authorities and by Approved Housing Bodies on their behalf. Given the very wide range of project activity that is covered at each separate meeting, the compilation of the information sought in terms of a schedule of each project discussed at each of these quarterly meetings, would involve a disproportionate amount of time and work. However, precise information in relation to issues around individual projects will be available from the relevant local authorities that are directly involved in their delivery.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

547. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 627 of 2 October 2018, the reason a single stage process was not used for this project in view of the fact that it falls under both thresholds in the criteria, under €2 million and less than 15 units; if a cost-benefit analysis and tender process was undertaken for the project (details supplied); the number of single stage and four stage processes nationally, by local authority, since 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41118/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The single stage approval process was introduced on a pilot basis in early 2016 for social housing projects, with an all-in budget up to €2 million or no more than 15 units. The single stage approval process was further refined this year following consultation between my Department and the City and County Management Association (CCMA) and the revised process allows some post tender adjustments in specific circumstances.

In the case of the Kilmantain Place scheme, Wicklow County Council opted to progress this project through the four stage approval process. A Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA) is a key economic appraisal technique under the Public Spending Code, and is only required for capital projects in excess of €20 million. In the case of this scheme, a CBA was not required and the tender process, which is a matter directly for each individual local authority, is carried out in line with the requirements of the Capital Works Management Framework.

There are currently 12 projects nationally being progressed under the single stage approval process. There are also an increasing number of projects being progressed through the turnkey

approach, which is a one stage approval process. Local authorities have substantial pipelines of new build social housing projects, and all approved projects can be seen in the quarterly Social Housing Construction Status Reports published by my Department. The most recently available report sets out the position as at end Quarter 2 2018 and is available at the following link: *http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/minister-murphy-publishes-latest-social-housing-construction-report/*.

Local Authority Housing Data

548. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of houses purchased and or acquired by compulsory purchase order by Louth County Council in 2017 and to date in 2018; and the number of houses purchased in Drogheda, County Meath by address and purchase cost, in tabular form. [41145/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department publishes information on the social homes built, acquired and leased by each local authority, which is available at the following link: *www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordble/overall-social-housing-provision*. My Department does not have information on the precise method through which the range of such properties were acquired, whether involving compulsory purchase orders or otherwise. The majority of property acquisitions by local authorities are carried out under delegated sanction, without a prior approval from my Department.

Specific information on the acquisition programme of Louth County Council may be available from the local authority itself.

My Department will continue to support Louth County Council and other local authorities in their work to acquire properties, particularly vacant properties where these can be remediated and made available for social housing.

Local Authority Expenditure

549. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the procedures, checks and balances in circumstances in which there is a local authority overspend. [41146/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Local Government Act 2001, as amended by the Local Government Reform Act 2014, provides the legislative basis for the local authority budget process. It is a matter for each local authority to determine its own spending priorities in the context of the annual budgetary process having regard to both locally identified needs and available resources. The elected members of a local authority have direct responsibility in law for all reserved functions of the authority, which includes adopting the annual budget, and are democratically accountable for all expenditure by the local authority.

Local authorities are required to adopt budgets which are sufficient to meet the expenditure arising in the year in accordance with the terms of section 10A of the City and County Management Act 1955, as inserted in that Act by section 113 of the Local Government Act 2001. Local Authority budgets must be balanced, sufficient to defray the expenditure necessary to maintain a reasonable standard of public services and must provide for payment of any sums which the local authority is bound to pay. The adoption of a balanced budget is probably the single most

important duty that the elected members are called upon to carry out each year. To achieve that balance, the members must make informed and necessary choices to balance the level of service provision with the available income. Note 16 in the Annual Financial Statements of local authorities shows the difference between the adopted budgets and the actual outturn in respect of both expenditure and income.

In the context of the budget process, similar to any organisation, local authorities' levels of expenditure and income are forecast based on informed judgments, assumptions and decisions. Section 104 of the Local Government Act 2001 sets out the requirements on local authorities governing additional expenditure, which means the spending of money or the incurring of a liability not provided for in a local authority budget. Section 104 (2) states that "at any time after it has adopted a budget a local authority may, following a proposal under subsection (3) or otherwise, by resolution authorise the incurring of additional expenditure".

The Local Government Audit Service provides a professional, independent audit service to local authorities. In the annual audit reports of local authorities there is a report on any spending in excess of the amount budgeted, along with confirmation that the overspend has been approved by resolution of the members in line with Section 104 (2).

In order to enhance the financial management and audit control systems in local authorities, an audit committee, with both councillor and expert external membership, is now in place in each authority. The functions of an audit committee are to review financial and budgetary reporting practices and procedures within a local authority, foster the development of best practice in the internal audit function, review auditors' reports and special reports and assess follow-up action by management, assess and promote efficiency and value for money, review risk management systems and make such recommendations to the authority as the committee considers appropriate in respect of such matters.

County and City Managers' Association

550. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the detail of an association (details supplied); the function and role it has vis-à-vis Government; the body which funds it on a day to day basis; the amount of funding it receives annually from the State; the role it has to play in policy creation within his Department; if it has statutory powers; if so, the exact legislation which underpins it; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41147/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The County and City Management Association (CCMA) is the organisation through which senior managers in local government provide sectoral leadership across business and programme areas. The CCMA operates through a number of committees, each of which is concerned with a specific policy area and these committees interact with relevant Government Departments and Agencies on a structured basis.

While the CCMA works closely with Government Departments and other key stakeholders on key public service delivery issues, my Department has no function in relation to its internal operations and does not provide funding to it.

Legislative Programme

551. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government

when he plans to revert to the Joint Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government in relation to the wording of the Thirty-fifth Amendment of the Constitution (Water in Public Ownership) (No. 2) Bill 2016. [41149/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I wrote to the Chairperson of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government on 11 July 2018 to provide an update on work to develop an alternative wording for a constitutional amendment on the public ownership of water services with a view to amending the Thirty-fifth Amendment of the Constitution (Water in Public Ownership) (No. 2) Bill 2016.

Government is firmly committed to public water services remaining in public ownership and this is reflected in the Water Services Acts. The Water Services Policy Statement 2018-2025 approved by Government and published by me in May 2018 acknowledges that there is widespread support for this view, as recognised in the Oireachtas approval in April 2017 of the report of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Future Funding of Domestic Water Services which supports the concept of a referendum on the issue of water services continuing in public ownership. The Water Services Policy Statement further notes that the question of the holding of a referendum is currently before the Dáil Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government where I have indicated my willingness to facilitate the holding of a referendum if a robust wording can be agreed, and where this does not have unintended consequences for group and private water services.

Contacts and discussions have been taking place between my Department and the Office of the Attorney General, with this engagement considering different approaches to the wording of a Constitutional amendment. In this regard, in early July I received written advice from the Attorney General on the matter and officials in my Department have been reviewing this. My aim is to be in a position to bring a recommendation to Government on a wording capable of being prepared as an amendment to the Bill. I hope to have clarity on the intended approach during the coming month when I plan to write again to the Committee.

In the meantime, I would welcome the opportunity of meeting with the Deputy, who is a sponsor of the Bill, to advise on recent progress. My office will make contact with the Deputy in this regard.

Ministerial Communications

552. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if there is a policy regarding ministerial use of private email for Government business in his Department; and if so, if it will be published. [41526/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department's ICT function provides a Department secure email service. My Department has ICT Security Policies in place and requires users to not include departmental confidential information within personal email. The ICT Security Policies are not published on security grounds.

Official Engagements

553. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he and or officials in his Department attended the 2018 Ryder Cup; if so, the reason they attended; the days on which they attended; the officials they met from a Ryder Cup organisation

or the European Tour; and the costs for each individual's attendance. [41538/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I can confirm that neither myself, nor any of my officials, attended the 2018 Ryder Cup in a work-related or official capacity.

Budget Submissions

554. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will address a matter (details supplied) regarding a budget 2019 submission; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41130/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh) (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy is aware, the 2019 Budget Estimates will be announced today by my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, and it would be inappropriate for me to make any comment prior to that official announcement.

Wildlife Control

555. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will provide a copy of each application for a licence to carry out control actions on seagulls including the reason for each application; and the case made to justify each application from 1 January 2016 to date in 2018. [40650/18]

556. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will provide a copy of each licence granted that permitted control actions on seagulls including site reports from rangers in circumstances in which such arose; the determination made towards the granting of each licence; and the reason for granting each licence by reference to EU legislation and or national legislation and pertinent EU or national derogation provisions. [40651/18]

557. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will provide a copy of each decision to refuse a licence sought to carry out control actions on seagulls including site reports from rangers in circumstances in which such arose since 1 January 2016; the determination made towards the refusal to grant such a licence; and the reason since for refusing such a licence by reference to EU legislation and or national legislation. [40652/18]

558. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if a licence was issued for public safety reasons only with regard to all licences issued by her Department since 1 January 2016 permitting control action on seagulls, as distinct from public health and safety as is specified in the EU birds directive legislation and derogation provisions; the evidential basis for such a determination; and the distinctions made to justify preclusion of the public health segment of a composite phrase in the legislation. [40653/18]

559. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the evidential basis for determinations with regard to all licences issued by her Department since 1 January 2016 permitting control action on seagulls in cases in which licences were issued for public health and safety reasons; and the precise evidential characteristics that warranted recognition of the complete legally specified public health and safety reason provisions. [40654/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 555 to 559, inclusive, together.

There are provisions under sections 22 and 42 of the Wildlife Acts allowing for the granting of licences and permits to control bird species, including seagulls, in certain circumstances. These applications are examined in my Department on a case by case basis and a decision on each individual application is made in consultation with regional officials of the National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department.

Given the volume of material sought here, I am arranging for my Department to provide the Deputy with information in tabular format on the number of such licences/permits issued by my Department since January 2016 to date to control seagulls. The information will include details as to the control method employed, such as the removal of nests or eggs, the location in each case and the reasons for granting the licence/permit. Details will also be provided on the applications for the control of seagulls refused by my Department during the same period.

Arts and Culture Capital Scheme

560. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will announce a new arts and culture capital scheme from 2019 onwards; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40872/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): Project Ireland 2040 has given explicit recognition to the importance of our culture, language and heritage to our sustainable development by the unprecedented commitment by Government to invest €1.2 billion over the next decade. Investing in our Culture, Language and Heritage 2018-2027 sets out the Government's objectives for capital investment in Ireland's culture, language and heritage. The plan sets out significant investment on a phased basis over the next 10 years including €785 m for Culture. This level of investment will transform our cultural infrastructure right across the country and includes plans to reinvest in our regional cultural infrastructure.

The recent Arts and Culture Capital Scheme 2016-2018 is focused on the refurbishment and enhancement of the existing stock of arts and culture facilities throughout the country. To date, funding of €10.214 m has been allocated to 134 projects under three complementary grant streams. This is the most significant investment in cultural infrastructure in a decade with funding provided to a range of facilities, including arts centres, theatres, galleries and museums, as well as artists' studios and creative spaces. A full list of all successful projects is available on my Department's website at the following link *https://www.chg.gov.ie/arts/creative-arts/grants-and-funding/*.

This Scheme is making a huge difference to each of the individual organisations and my Department is already seeing good outcomes and receiving positive feedback. My Department is currently giving consideration to a new round of grant funding under Arts and Cultural Capital Scheme to be announced in the near future.

Wildlife Rangers

561. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the estimated full cost of recruiting an extra 50 full-time conservation rangers for the National Parks and Wildlife Service; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40884/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I am advised that, based on current pay levels, the estimated cost of recruiting an additional 50 full-

time Conservation Rangers for the National Parks and Wildlife Service would be €1,302,986 per annum.

Architectural Heritage

562. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her plans for the restoration of a castle and a house (details supplied); if alternative plans exist for the two buildings; if funding has been allocated to Monaghan County Council in this regard; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40947/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): My role, as Minister, with regard to the protection and management of our architectural heritage, is set out in the provisions of relevant legislation, as are the role of local authorities and the responsibilities of owners as regards heritage assets.

The buildings referred to by the Deputy are in local authority ownership. In relation to the first building, I understand the local authority is working to assess the potential to redevelop and find a long term sustainable use for it. As part of this process I am informed that an appraisal of the building was carried out by consultants on behalf of the County Council, a public consultation was held by the local authority and the consultants' report was presented to the Council in April 2018.

My Department provides financial support for the protection of heritage buildings and historic structures through the Structures at Risk Fund (SRF) and the Built Heritage Investment Scheme (BHIS), which are administered by local authorities. This year I have allocated €1.3 m and €2 m, respectively, to these schemes.

I have also provided funding of €1 m in 2018 for the Historic Towns Initiative, which is a joint initiative of my Department and the Heritage Council. This initiative is supporting six historic towns in 2018 which are carrying out significant heritage regeneration projects. I understand that the local authority were successful in applying for funding under the Initiative this year for works to the second building mentioned, but the application was subsequently withdrawn by the local authority pending their consideration of a long-term plan for the future of the building.

In terms of future funding, Investing in our Culture, Language and Heritage 2018–2027 represents a major capital investment scheme of €1.2 billion over the next 10 years, which will include increased investment in protecting and celebrating our built heritage across the country. More details on the commencement and completion dates for projects and programmes, as well as the timing of the expenditure in relation to them, will emerge as we go through the process of appraisal and planning as required under the Public Spending Code.

Harbours and Piers Funding

563. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the amount of funding granted for an update on Magheroarty Pier, County Donegal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41009/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh) (Deputy Joe McHugh): As the Deputy is no doubt aware, the development of the pier at Machaire Rabhartaigh has been included in Project Ireland 2040. My Department

is working with Donegal County Council and relevant stakeholders to progress this proposal to the planning stage. Among the earliest tasks of this phase of the project will be a full costing of its various elements. As is the norm with any major capital project funded by my Department, funding will be approved at different stages of the project from the start-up stage to completion, depending on the availability of resources and in line with the provisions of the Public Spending Code.

Local Authority Funding

564. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the amount allocated to Donegal County Council to carry out works to the Bunbeg Bridge, Gweedore; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41010/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh) (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Deputy may be aware that my Department sanctioned funding of €56,850 to Donegal County Council to carry out works on this bridge in 2005 under the Gaeltacht Village Renewal Scheme. Under this scheme, funding was provided to the relevant local authorities to undertake agreed programmes of works aimed at improving village environments within Gaeltacht regions. It would appear however that the project did not proceed at that time and as the Deputy may be aware, the Gaeltacht Village Renewal Scheme has been suspended for a number of years.

I should also point out that under the Department's Scéim na mBóithre Áise, funding was similarly provided to local authorities to carry out repair works on minor roads in Gaeltacht areas, subject to a number of criteria, including whether the road in question was under the care of the relevant local authority. Notwithstanding that this scheme has similarly been suspended for a number of years, neither the bridge referred to by the Deputy nor the road in question on which it lies could be considered eligible under that scheme as it is within the care of the local authority.

Structures At Risk Fund

565. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if an application for funding (details supplied) will be expedited; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41018/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I refer the Deputy to my responses to Parliamentary Questions No. 549 of 25 September 2018 and 262 of 26 September 2018, in relation to the same structure. My Department is currently assessing proposals put forward by the project promoters.

Official Languages Act 2003 Compliance

566. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of State bodies that have not to date submitted a language plan under the Official Languages Act 2003; the name of each such organisation in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41219/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh) (Deputy Joe McHugh): In accordance with Section 11(1) of the Official Lan-

guages Act (2003), my Department is actively engaged in the process of agreeing inaugural and subsequent schemes with a large number of public bodies. At present there are 43 public bodies who are in the process of preparing their inaugural language schemes.

Having regard to the reduction in the number of public sector bodies since the commencement of the Act, the drafting of a new Regulation to update the list of public bodies listed in the First Schedule to the Act is currently being progressed as a priority by my Department.

It should be noted that the language schemes currently being implemented cover the majority of public bodies who have regular contact with the general public.

Inaugural draft schemes to be confirmed under section 11 (1) of the 2003 Act

1. Abbey Theatre

2. Adoption Authority of Ireland

3. Bord Gáis Éireann

4. Bord Iascaigh Mhara

5. Bord na Móna

6. Cavan & Monaghan Education & Training Board

7. Charities Regulatory Authority

8. Child and Family Support Agency

9. City of Dublin Education & Training Board

10. Coillte Teoranta

11. Commission for Energy Regulation

12. Competition and Consumer Protection Authority

13. Córas Iompair Éireann Group incorporating Bus Éireann, Bus Átha Cliath & Iarnród Éireann

14. Cork Airport Authority plc

15. Cork Institute of Technology

16. Employment Appeals Tribunal

17. Enterprise Ireland

18. Fáilte Ireland - National Tourism Development Authority

19. Food Safety Authority of Ireland

20. Government Information Services

21. Health and Safety Authority

22. Heritage Council

23. Housing Agency

24. IDA Ireland

25. Inland Fisheries Ireland

26. Irish Blood Transfusion Service

27. Irish Prison Service

28. Irish Sports Council

29. Kilkenny and Carlow Education and Training Board

30. Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board

31. Limerick Institute of Technology

32. Longford & Westmeath Education and Training Board

33. National Archives

34. National Concert Hall

35. National Disability Authority

36. National Library of Ireland

37. National Milk Agency

38. Office of the Appeals Commissioners

39. Office of the Chief Medical Officer for the Civil Service

40. Probation Service

41. The Health Service Executive

42. The Private Security Authority

43. The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland

Ministerial Communications

567. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if there is a policy regarding ministerial use of private email for Government business in her Department; and if so, if it will be published. [41520/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): As I advised the Deputy in my response to Parliamentary Question 553 of 25th September, official email business in my role as Minister is conducted via Department and Oireachtas email accounts. On occasion, when outside the office, I make use of a private g-mail account on my mobile phone to forward information of a non-sensitive nature to my private office, generally relating to diary appointments or constituency matters.

Minister of State Joe McHugh has also confirmed that only Oireachtas and Department email addresses are used for official business and that no personal email accounts are used for business purposes.

For completeness, I would advise the Deputy that, while my Department operates an Acceptable Usage Policy in relation to the use of ICT equipment, this policy does not specifically preclude the use of personal email accounts for official purposes.

Official Engagements

568. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she and-or officials in her Department attended the 2018 Ryder Cup; if so, the reason they attended; the days on which they attended; the officials they met from a Ryder Cup organisation or the European Tour; and the costs for each individual's attendance. [41534/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan)(Deputy Josepha Madigan): Neither I nor any representatives of my Department attended this event in an official capacity. I can also confirm that neither I nor any of my officials have engaged in any meetings of the kind referred to by the Deputy.